Volt

Europe in a multipolar future

Reforms to adapt the European Union to a changing world

White paper

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Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, European states have assumed that globalisation will inevitably lead to a more democratic and free world, and that the future will be shaped by the combined economic, innovative and diplomatic capital of America and Europe. European states have down-prioritised national security and built the European security order on American defence guarantees. International institutions such as the UN have been assumed to follow Western leadership. Free trade has been assumed to push authoritarian states towards democracy. Europe has lived comfortably in the illusion of the end of history, in a world order where Europe does not have to actively promote its interests, democracy or human rights in the world.

Today, the world is in the midst of a transition period that is fundamentally disrupting this illusion. Emerging regional and global powers are challenging and resisting the international systems designed to maintain peace and multilateral cooperation. Authoritarian states are overtly undermining democracy and human rights internally and in their neighbourhood. Trade and access to advanced technologies are increasingly being used as weapons in economic conflict between states. At the same time, the world is facing ever increasing global and existential challenges that can only be addressed through cooperation, such as pandemics, raw material shortages and global warming.

We thus find ourselves in a period where the unipolar world order that has prevailed since the Cold War is gradually shifting to a more fragmented and multipolar world. This analysis is not new or groundbreaking. European countries have been forced to consider their future after several disruptive events in recent years, such as the Brexit referendum, Donald Trump's presidency in the United States, the Corona pandemic and most recently the Russian invasion of Ukraine. After years of reflection, European states must now decide: should Europe and its states be passive spectators in the face of a changing world, or should Europe assert itself as an independent player in this new world order?

For Volt, the answer is simple: Europe can and must act as its own player on the global stage. We believe that Europe must ensure its strategic autonomy and show leadership to address the global challenges we face. To assert itself in this new world, Europe must be able to resist the interests and influence of the great powers of today, and use its own economic, diplomatic and military power to promote peace, democracy, human rights and multilateralism.

European states must accept the uncomfortable fact that the challenges facing our continent are too big, too complex and too international for individual European countries to solve on their own. As the mandate of national politics ends at national borders, we argue that they are insufficient to address these international problems. We believe that national politics in Europe have started to reach their limits. In this White Paper, we want to challenge national thinking and highlight the need to see the EU as the main player in Europe instead of its member states. We argue that the only way for Europe to achieve strategic autonomy is through a deeper political integration of the EU, with a pan-European political arena, common institutions, and solidarity-based decision-making. To ensure Europe's role in the multipolar world order, we argue in favour of reforming the EU into a European federation.

This White Paper consists of three parts. First, we describe the challenges that we see Europe facing today, and why the EU in its current state cannot address them. Then, we present our solution to these problems: a European federal state. Finally, we explore the potential of such a European federation as an actor on the global stage, and describe what Volt believes such an actor should do.

What is Volt?

Volt Europa is a pan-european political party, founded in 2017 as a response to lacking European integration. Volt is active in 31 European countries, with over 20.000 members and 100 elected officials across the continent. As a true European party, Volt has a common party structure and is running on a political platform that all members, regardless of nationality, have participated in developing. Volts vision is that of a united, federal Europe, ready to tackle today's big challenges, and work for peace, human rights and democracy in the world. Volts Swedish chapter was founded in 2018 and participated in the European elections in 2019 and the national elections in 2022.

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Challenges in a multipolar world
Sitting on the sidelines is not an option in modern geopolitics

As the world moves towards a more multipolar order, there are a number of complex and interconnected challenges that European countries must address. At the same time, European countries must also re-assess their position in the world, and recognise that even the major players within the EU lack real influence on the international stage. An increasing number of the challenges European countries face are too large and complex to be solved by national policies and actions alone. The following are examples of such challenges arising from the global transition to multipolarity.

European safety and democracy under threat
Today's security challenges are bigger than the European states.

While European leaders have historically had high hopes for a democratic and European development in post-Soviet Russia, it is time to accept the reality that Russia is a hostile state and a threat to the world's democracies. Using modern hybrid warfare, the Russian state actively seeks to undermine democracy in its neighbourhood. It seeks to destabilise and weaken Europe, both through direct military attacks and through irregular methods such as psychological warfare, cyber attacks and other influence operations. The Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008, the military intervention in Belarus in 2021 and Kazakhstan in 2022, the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 are all contemporary examples of Russia's willingness to use military force and terror to oppose democracy in its neighbouring countries. In addition, Russia is sponsoring and training individuals and militant groups from the European far right, conducting deep influence operations on European states via cyber attacks and social media, and assassinating political opponents. Examples include the poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal with the outlawed chemical weapon Novichok in the UK in 2018, the poisoning of Alexei Navalny in 2020, and the attempted assassination of Tumso Abdurakhmanov in Sweden in 2020. Russian intelligence carried out sabotage on Bulgarian and Czech military warehouses and factories between 2014-2015, killing dozens of EU citizens, and also attempted a coup d'état in Bulgaria in the spring of 2016 [1].

Russia is not the only player actively seeking to undermine democracy and security in Europe and beyond. China is conducting a low-intensity but long-term offensive on democracies and international systems. The Chinese state is funding similar influence operations as Russia, with the intention of fuelling internal tensions and polarising democratic societies. Chinese companies are buying up physical and digital infrastructure around the world, which is used to spy on citizens, companies and state institutions. Chinese investments in Africa, South America and the Middle East are used to bind countries through debt traps and turn them against the West in international bodies such as the UN. China operates extrajudicial "police stations" in many countries to repress Chinese dissidents who have fled China [2]. At the same time, China is directly attacking international treaties through military threats against Taiwan and through intervening in Hong Kong's democratic government. In addition, China's response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine has been to support the Russian state through spreading Kremlin propaganda, diplomatic support in UN votes and by opposing sanctions.

European states' own capacity to counter these varied threats has declined since the end of the Cold War, with a general disarmament and de-prioritisation of national security. As a result, Europe's security is dependent on US military and intelligence services. Although the US is Europe's biggest ally, the analysis of the Trump era must lead to the realisation that this alliance is not guaranteed. The growing internal polarisation within the US, and in particular the continued radicalisation of the Republican Party, means that US commitments must be seen as increasingly unreliable. Former President Donald Trump's 2016 election campaign actively sought help from Russia, which through influence operations, funding, and direct cyber attacks on opponents supported the Republican Party and contributed to Donald Trump's election victory. Many of today's leading Republicans still question America's commitments to European security and defence. In recent years, the party has increasingly embraced authoritarian and reactionary ideologies, and its leadership has celebrated authoritarian states and regimes. There is a real possibility that the Republicans will win the next election, therefore Europe can no longer solely rely on American support in defence and security matters.

The only real direct military threat we face today comes from Russia, which is the only country with both the capacity and will to conduct wars of aggression in Europe. Very few European countries have the population, defence industry and military capabilities to withstand a Russian attack on their own. Western analyses estimate that the Ukrainian army may have suffered up to 100,000 casualties [3] and has been confirmed to have lost over 3,000 military vehicles, including nearly 500 tanks [4], during the first year of the war. In comparison, the Swedish Armed Forces can call up a total of 57,000 people including conscripts, and owns approximately 120 tanks. For many countries, the monetary and social cost of building the military capacity required to withstand a Russian attack would have to be so high that other parts of society would be negatively affected. The scale of the military threats that European states are facing are thus too great to be solved solely by national political decisions, and this also applies to Sweden. Europe has already realised this, and an international solution has been reached through Nato.

Nato is a good solution to the security problems we face and it is in Europe's interest to resist Russian aggression and strengthen the transatlantic cooperation with our American friends. But Sweden's application to Nato has clearly shown the shortcomings of the alliance. Authoritarian member states such as Hungary and Turkey have in recent years forged ties with Russia and are using Nato as a forum to push their domestic agendas. In addition, Turkey is behaving increasingly aggressively towards their Nato ally Greece. These states are thus sabotaging the cohesion of the Alliance from within. Therefore, to truly guarantee Europe's security, another common solution is needed: a European defence force.

Migration in a unpredictable world
Fruitless migration debates have polarised our societies

Asylum and migration issues have poisoned the social climate and political debate in all European countries. The emerging consensus has been to see immigration and refugees as unanimously problematic, and the trends in all European countries have been towards reducing immigration and asylum reception. This has often been achieved by setting up inhumane systems to prevent refugees from entering our countries and claiming their right to asylum, and by making our societies less attractive for labour migration and consequently also to our own citizens. Despite constant national focus across Europe, no satisfactory solution to migration and asylum has been found. Even the countries that have reduced their immigration and asylum reception the most continue to focus intensively on these issues. In Sweden, the debate is seemingly stuck in the 2015 refugee crisis and has not moved since.

The reason why no satisfactory solution has been found is that migration and asylum are such large and complex problems that it is simply not possible to find sustainable solutions within the mandate of national politics. This realisation is missing from national debates, but is despite this no less true. The challenges are simply too great for individual European countries to solve on their own, and can only be addressed by common European asylum- and migration policies.

This is most evident when it comes to asylum policy. Among European politicians, a responsible and sustainable asylum policy has meant keeping the annual reception rate as low as possible for as long as possible. National asylum systems have therefore been built to handle a low but constant annual number of asylum seekers [5]. To keep reception low, European states have been willing to bend their international commitments, for example through illegal pushbacks at the EU's external borders, or through internal passport controls that violate the Schengen Agreement. The EU also has agreements with countries such as Libya and Turkey that prevent refugees from crossing into the EU in return for financial support and other concessions. In Libya, this policy has resulted in inhumane refugee camps, where refugees are subjected to physical and sexual abuse [6]. The lack of safe routes to Europe leads to thousands of people drowning in the Mediterranean Sea every year [7]. Preventing asylum seekers from physically crossing borders also prevents them from claiming their right to asylum. This way, the Refugee Convention and other commitments can be violated without legal consequences. It is shameful that Europe's states and politicians are willing to violate the spirit of the law to this extent, and abdicate responsibility for the humanitarian disaster taking place at the EU's borders.

The mantra that a responsible asylum policy can only mean as low but constant reception as possible is based on a false premise: that it is possible for politicians and states to control the flow of refugees. Refugee crises are inherently unpredictable, therefore it is impossible to guarantee a certain level of reception every year and it is irresponsible to build a system that cannot cope with large and sudden increases in reception. We only need to look back at the Russian invasion of Ukraine to illustrate this. Just one week after the start of the invasion on the 24th of February 2022, over one million people had fled Ukraine [8]. These are one million refugees that had not existed seven days prior. A year later, there are now eight million Ukrainian refugees [9], and over four million of them have received protection in the EU under

the Temporary Protection Directive [10] The fact that the Temporary Protection Directive was unanimously activated one week after the start of the war clearly shows that the national systems are not sustainable - otherwise this european system would not have been necessary. This should be a wake-up call for Europe's politicians.

It is not only asylum reception that is affected by fragmented and nationalistic decision-making in the EU. All European countries are facing major labour shortages in the coming decades. Our population is declining due to low birth rates, while we are living longer and the average age of the population is increasing. The EU's working age population is projected to decline by 35 million by 2050, while an increasing share of the population is retiring, leading to steadily rising welfare expenditure. Taken together, this means that by 2050 there will be less than two people working per person that is not working in the EU. By 2070, the ratio is projected to be one to one [11].

Labour shortages will acutely affect all sectors and lower living standards across the entire continent. Initiatives to boost birth rates and increase automation and efficiency in industry will be important long-term strategies to address this problem. However, there is no possible solution that does not involve migration: the EU needs more labour in the short term, and this can only come from immigration. To secure its needs, Europe must present itself as an attractive alternative to successfully compete with other countries that have similar needs.

Although European countries need more immigration to maintain the integrity of the labour market, key reforms to increase labour migration have been opposed by national governments, often on a nativist basis. Immigration is seen as problematic and as a threat to society's culture and values. In some EU countries, the debate has devolved into ethno-nationalism and doomsday rhetoric, and it is increasingly common for established political parties to promote deeply racist talking points and conspiracy theories such as demographic replacement. Even in countries where the public debate has not gone that far, it is increasingly common for parties across the political spectrum to want to appear tough on immigration, often justified as a response to failed integration. This is also based on a false premise: that integration is a zero-sum game. It does not automatically become easier for an immigrant to find housing or employment if another is prevented from moving to Europe or from bringing their family. These integration issues can only be solved by directed integration reforms, in this case in housing and labour policy. When political parties chase votes by engaging in harsh anti-immigration rhetoric, they miss the social and labour market reforms needed to build effective integration and a tolerant, pluralistic and multicultural society. There is room in the debate for a European perspective.

The EU's internal market and freedom of movement have not been accompanied by a fully integrated labour market. One of the clearest examples of this lack of integration is that the EU's internal freedom of movement does not apply to non-European immigrants. If you get a job in New York, you do not have to apply for a new visa to change to a job in San Francisco. However, if you find a job in Stockholm, you have to go through an entirely new visa process to move to a job in Rome. Non-European immigrants living in border regions cannot freely commute across the border for work and have to apply for separate work permits. Anyone wishing to apply for citizenship of an EU member state is further restricted, as the requirements for citizenship often mean that you have to live in the same country for an

extended period of time without interruption. In practice, this makes the EU a less attractive destination for highly skilled labour migration than the alternatives. It also means that the EU's internal job market is not fully utilised to employ citizens and to combat social exclusion and crime.

Trade and foreign policy in the age of geopolitics

European decision making is paralyzed when national and common interests conflict

The EU grew out of economic cooperation, and through the internal market, Europe has benefited greatly from globalisation and international trade. The EU accounts for around 14 % of global trade in goods [12] and is the largest trading partner with over 80 countries [13]. As a trading giant, EU legislation on standards and regulations for industry and trade tends to be exported to the outside world. The EU thus has a very extensive soft power, while at the same time being a pillar of the international trading system. This global trade has brought great prosperity to Europe. But it also represents a potential vulnerability for European decision making and strategic autonomy, that can only be addressed through proactive action by the EU. The question the EU needs to ask is: what happens when major players in the global economy oppose the international systems, and how can the EU proactively respond to these challenges? This means that the EU must also answer the follow-up question: is it possible to act proactively with the EU's current political structure?

A contemporary example that illustrates the problems arising when international systems are opposed by major players can be found during the Covid pandemic and the protectionism that emerged around vaccine exports in spring 2021. In the early stages when Covid vaccines first became available, the US and UK governments introduced various forms of export restrictions on vaccines and vaccine components to ensure their own needs were satisfied [14]. At this early stage, the EU did not have similar export restrictions, resulting in the EU exporting over 34 million doses of vaccine to the rest of the world until March 9th 2021. This included over 9 million doses to the UK and almost 1 million doses to the US, [15]. In response, the EU itself imposed similar and harsh export restrictions in March 2021, which lasted until early 2022. There is an important discussion here about the ethics of export restrictions on life-saving medicines. You can ask how these restrictions affected developing and poor countries that lacked their own domestic vaccine production, whether the restrictions prolonged the pandemic, and what obligations national governments have to their own citizens as opposed to the rest of the world. These important questions are beyond the scope of this White Paper. Regardless of moral considerations, it is clear that in the early stages the US and the UK opposed the international trade regimes that the EU followed. As a result, the EU's access to vaccines was reduced, delaying the vaccination of its own population. As the EU is currently dependent on imports of many critical raw materials and much of our technology, there is a risk of similar situations arising in the future, for instance for microchips and phosphorus.

The EU's trade dependence represents a strategic vulnerability that often restricts decision making options for EU countries, especially where trade and foreign policy intersect. A recent and obvious example was the EU's import dependence on Russian natural gas. This dependency arose from the actions of individual national governments, but gave Russia a

weapon to threaten and destabilise the entire EU. As a result, it has historically been difficult for national governments, especially those most dependent on Russian gas, to criticise Vladimir Putin's regime and the atrocities committed by the Russian state against its own population and its neighbours. At the same time, EU imports have been financing Putin's corrupt regime, which goes against the EU's stated desire to promote peace and democracy in the world. Following the EU's harsh sanctions in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Russia has in turn capitalised on this gas dependency and reduced its exports to the EU in retaliation, which has been a major contributing factor to the energy crisis we face today. To compensate, the EU has instead signed import agreements with authoritarian Azerbaijan, which also commits atrocities and wars of aggression against its neighbours.

Another example is the difficulty the EU has in navigating the ongoing trade war between the US and China. Since the trade war is not only an economic issue, but also very much a foreign policy issue, the EU has had difficulty finding a common solution due to fragmented national decision-making. This is very clear when it comes to the approach towards China.

European states are very divided on how the EU should deal with China. The Chinese state repeatedly violates international trade rules, favours Chinese companies and discriminates against international companies in the Chinese market through targeted state aid and unfair procurement deals. China also carries out well-documented influence operations, industrial espionage and widespread data collection through its tech companies [16]. In addition, the Chinese state carries out a genocide against the Uighur minority in the Xinjiang province, and systematically represses dissidents internally within the country and beyond China's borders. As a result, there is a great deal of scepticism about China among some European countries, and there are legitimate concerns about the strategic weaknesses resulting from Chinese-owned infrastructure and the long-term impact of Chinese investment and acquisitions. Another question EU countries must ask is what happens to the global microchip market if China invades Taiwan, since Taiwan produces 60 % of the world's microchips. If China takes control of this microchip production, there is a high risk of a trade dependency similar to that of Russian natural gas. However, other European states believe that it is not possible to ignore China in the world market, and instead advocate pursuing free trade.

This fragmented view of China was well illustrated after the high-profile state visit to China by Emmanuel Macron and Ursula von der Leyen in April 2023, which was intended to demonstrate European unity. Ursula von der Leyen took a tough stance on China ahead of the visit, highlighting China's friendship and support for Russia despite the invasion of Ukraine. Emmanuel Macron instead brought a conciliatory message, avoiding criticism of China and Xi Jinping's regime and its violations of international law, and expressing a desire to reduce Europe's dependency on the US, especially in the context of a possible military confrontation over Taiwan [17]. Only a few hours after he left the country, China launched a military exercise simulating an encirclement and invasion of Taiwan. The fact that a meeting that was supposed to demonstrate European unity was instead dominated by a conflict between national and european interests, is symptomatic of the current political structure of the EU.

Europe also needs to find a unified approach to the US. The lesson of the Trump era is that old alliances and agreements cannot be taken for granted. President Donald Trump singled out the EU as one of America's biggest adversaries specifically on trade and introduced tariffs on

European aluminium and steel, among other things. There is also frustration among some US politicians over EU regulation of tech companies such as Facebook and Twitter. Another line of conflict is US government subsidies for US electric cars, which could disadvantage the European car industry. European politicians feel that some of these conflicts are being used by the US to try to get the EU to take a tougher stance on China [18]. The US focus on China is also perceived in other ways, such as when Australia in 2021 unexpectedly broke an agreement with France to build submarines in favour of buying British and American nuclear submarines through the AUKUS alliance. This must be seen in the context of an increasingly unpredictable security situation in Southeast Asia, with a possible military confrontation between the US and its allies and China. Both China and the US are thus trying to draw the EU into their conflict. Being the EU's largest import and export partners respectively, it is impossible for the EU to stand by as a passive spectator. But with the EU:s current fragmented political system, it is also impossible for the EU to coordinate a unified and coherent response to this challenge.

Conflicts between national interests have also complicated coordinating sanctions. This is a direct result of the need for unanimity in foreign policy matters, where all countries have a de facto veto. The sanctions the EU has put in place against Russia since the invasion of Ukraine have hurt the Russian economy [19], but due to national interests, some sectors have been excluded from sanctions, such as luxury goods like Russian diamonds, and in other cases sanctions have been delayed. Hungary has tried to hold these sanctions hostage as part of its strategy to negotiate access to EU funding that it has been excluded from due to the dismantling of the Hungarian rule of law. Another clear example was Cyprus's blocking of EU sanctions against Belarus in 2020, in an attempt to force the EU to impose sanctions on Turkey as well. In this case, a Member State representing 0.2 % of the EU population blocked sanctions that all other Member States agreed to. National economic and political interests thus routinely sabotage joint decision-making, especially on foreign policy issues.

Climate efforts in a warmer world
Global warming does not end at the borders

Global warming is the biggest challenge of our time and an existential threat to our societies and to humanity as a whole. In addition to the direct consequences of a warmer world, global warming also exacerbates all of the problems discussed above. Every year, over 21 million people are forced to flee their homes due to extreme weather conditions and natural disasters such as droughts, floods and forest fires. The World Bank estimates that this figure could rise to 216 million by 2050 [20]. It is important to recall that Europe is not immune, tens of thousands of Europeans are already forced to leave their homes every year due to extreme weather and natural disasters [21], and a large part of our continent's population lives in areas vulnerable to rising sea levels. Global warming worsens the availability of resources such as water and food, opening up new lines of conflict between states. The UN estimates that 40 % of all interstate conflicts in the last 60 years can be linked to natural resources, and climate change is expected to exacerbate these conflicts [22]. Armed conflict over resources also creates even more refugees. Besides the economic cost of dealing with climate change and extreme weather, global warming also interferes with the global market and its logistics

chains. For example, the global microchip shortage since 2020 is exacerbated by recurring droughts in Taiwan, forcing its microchip industry to scale down its production [23].

Global warming is a problem too big for individual nations to solve alone, and the world has already realised this. But despite international agreements and treaties, the world is moving faster and faster towards runaway global warming. After decades of failure, time is running out and the world must now turn its full attention to limiting warming, while preparing its societies for the reality of a warmer world. It takes vision and leadership to muster the political will needed to truly address global warming. We believe that Europe must show this leadership and initiative.

The result of today's interstate EU is that its climate action often is opposed by national interests that conflict with the reforms needed to tackle global warming. Ambitious climate packages are watered down to the lowest common denominator to suit national interests. One example is the decision to include natural gas in the EU's green taxonomy after pressure from countries dependent on natural gas. This opens up EU funding for more gas-fired power plants in Member States, which goes against the green transition to fossil-free energy sources. Another example is Germany's threat to block EU plans to ban internal combustion engines from 2035.

By not looking beyond national borders and to the EU as a whole, the national debate often lacks important European perspectives needed to find sustainable and effective climate action. This is well illustrated by the energy debate in European countries. In Sweden, energy policy was a key election issue during the 2022 elections, largely due to the high energy prices during the autumn and winter. But where the debate focused on how to expand Swedish energy production, it often lacked the perspective that Sweden was a net exporter of electricity almost every day in 2022, with total exports of 33 TWh [24]. Since Sweden is already Europe's largest electricity exporter, the energy crisis cannot possibly be solved by national investments in increased electricity production. Since Sweden still needs to import electricity some days, the answer also cannot be to disconnect the Swedish grid from Europe. The energy crisis is thus not a national issue, it is a European issue, and political decision-making must adapt accordingly. Here, national investments in Swedish electricity supply can definitely contribute to the solution - Sweden's exports are estimated to have offset at least 8 million tonnes of CO_2 emissions from fossil fuels in 2022 [25] and this should continue. But the energy crisis can only be solved in the long term by investing in an expansion and fossil-free transition of the entire European energy supply, and by creating an integrated European electricity grid. To solve the energy crisis, investments outside of Sweden are required, and this task is impossible for Swedish politicians to achieve alone.

The lack of a European perspective in decision-making also leads to Europe's joint climate work being counteracted by national actions that do not consider how decisions affect the rest of Europe. A current example in relation to the energy debate is Germany's decision to close its nuclear power plants despite the European energy crisis and despite the fact that no fossil-free alternatives are available to replace the lost capacity. To cover its energy needs, coal-fired power plants are activated, generating unnecessary CO_2 emissions. Europe faces a recurring energy crisis in the coming winters and we must now face it without German nuclear power. All

EU countries and EU citizens will thus be affected to varying degrees by this national decision in which their interests have not been represented.

European countries cannot tackle global warming on their own, but powerful solutions can be found within the EU. The EU has a robust soft power and often leads the way in establishing international standards and building new systems to regulate industries and trade. The EU's internal economic cooperation also provides a natural basis for facilitating the green transition of our societies. However, it is important to recall that no EU country is on track to fulfil the Paris Agreement [26] and that much of the climate action must ultimately be carried out at national level. There is great variation between EU countries in terms of political will to tackle global warming, and also a tendency among many politicians to shift climate action to the EU as a way to escape their own responsibility. This is often justified by pointing to Member States that are doing worse than their own country, and arguing that their own efforts do not matter as long as those countries do not improve. However, this is not the same as seeing the fight against climate change from a European perspective, where the goal is a climate-neutral EU through a green transition in all Member States. Seeing the EU primarily as an interstate forum for cooperation, and not as a player in its own right, leads to a significant amount of the potential available in the EU being wasted.

Beyond unanimity
Institutional reforms are needed to put EU-citizens at the centre of decision making

We conclude that Europeans are facing several major problems and challenges that are too big for our nations and national politicians to solve alone. However, we also believe that a united EU would have the capacity to respond adequately to all of these challenges. The current state of the world and the internal and external challenges we face thus requires a fundamental reform of how we Europeans govern ourselves. We must ask ourselves what actions we can take as a community to strengthen our collective action and increase our opportunities in a geopolitical context. We would now like to present our reflections, which are based in our pan-European movement. Our focus is on how we can adapt our decision-making processes to enable a faster, fairer and more democratic way forward. Our reflections lead to a discussion on the principle of subsidiarity, common institutions and democratic representation, and what these really mean in a multipolar world.

Subsidiarity in a inter-state EU
A misinterpreted concept

The principle of subsidiarity is at the core of the European Union and is usually explained as bringing political decision-making as close to the citizens as possible. However, this is not the whole truth. In essence, the principle of subsidiarity is meant to ensure that a political decision is taken at the level closest to the people affected by the decision, but also at the level where the problem at hand can best be addressed. In today's interstate EU, the principle of subsidiarity is most often invoked to prevent a transfer of political powers to a more appropriate higher level that is seen as inconvenient for nation states. This results in a lot of political potential and opportunities being wasted in favour of national interests. The current political structure of the EU, where Member States - and not EU citizens - are the main actors in decision-making therefore often leads to Member States blocking the institutional, administrative, and democratic development of the EU. In a world that bombards us with more and more global challenges, our nation states are unable to find sustainable solutions on their own. At the same time, the EU's current political structure prevents us from effectively addressing these challenges together.

We therefore conclude that many actors in European politics are actually violating the principle of subsidiarity in many policy areas, since EU citizens as a whole have only limited opportunities to influence decisions through the European Parliament. All too often, it is argued that a higher European level is too far away from citizens. This is a strategy to keep decision-making closer to national interests. We therefore believe that actors who deliberately misinterpret or use incomplete definitions of the subsidiarity principle represent the biggest internal challenge facing the EU today. We want to challenge this harmful behaviour and use subsidiarity according to its true meaning. Therefore, we need to make two serious considerations: *Which is the right level to address a particular problem?* And *who really counts as a citizen when national decisions also affect citizens in other EU countries?*

To build a European state
State sovereignty requires democratic accountability

Let's start with a discussion on policy competences that today lie with the Member States but which, according to the principle of subsidiarity, would be better suited to the European level. We have already described some of the challenges we believe all European countries face, which fall mainly under three policy competences: foreign policy, defence, and trade.

It is important to understand that we are not talking about different forms of interstate cooperation in the above-mentioned policy areas. We are talking about the formal, vertical distribution of political competences between Member States and the EU. It is interesting that one of these competences - trade - is today an exclusive EU competence. But why is this the case? For many decades, the EU's purpose has been primarily centred on the economy and trade. The emergence of the European single market made it necessary to create an institutional structure capable of functioning as a bloc in relation to the outside world. Without these structures, the European single market would not be possible.

Just as we accepted the necessity that trade is a competence best handled at the EU level, we now have to recognise that this also applies to other areas, including foreign and defence policy. However, there are valid criticisms of transferring these competences to a supranational construct, which the EU can be considered to be today. Since defence and foreign policy are strongly associated with the exercise of a state's power and sovereignty, there must be a democratic framework to link this new state sovereignty to the popular sovereignty of the European citizens. In its current form, the EU lacks such a democratic framework, which makes it impossible to bring these powers to the European level in a democratic way at this time. Therefore, we first want to reform the internal political structure of the EU. We believe that three main reforms must be implemented before the EU can be considered ready to carry the competences associated with state sovereignty. First, the European Parliament must be reformed so that the parliamentarians truly represent European citizens, and not just their national constituencies. Then, it must be given the right to elect a European government. Finally, the EU's internal division of powers must be defined by a European constitution.

Towards a European parliamentary democracy
Transfer EU decision making from the member states to the citizens

Those of us who want to put EU citizens at the centre of European decision making must begin by strengthening the European Parliament. The parliament has to consist of genuine European parties that have campaigned as such in all Member States. Such a party landscape is necessary to allow European citizens to orientate themselves in a political context larger than the national one. A further consequence of such a party landscape is that it requires national party branches to campaign on the same programme in all Member States. Specifically, this means that - unlike today - parties cannot bypass citizens outside their own country during European election campaigns. This will force candidates and political leaders to engage in a real European debate instead of scoring political points at home at the expense of the European

interests. Having parties campaigning on the same programme in all Member States would also ensure that elected candidates primarily represent the interests of all EU citizens, as party programmes are necessarily drawn up by cross-border groupings. In this way, we can dissolve the national borders within the European Parliament. Transnational campaigns would also naturally lead to the creation of transnational lists. For European parties to work and represent all European citizens, they must be able to field candidates from all countries and not be bound by national quotas. Together, this will allow MEPs to represent a true European mandate instead of defining themselves as an extension of their country's interests. The European Parliament must also be given the right of initiative to make laws, which it currently lacks.

A parliament designed in such a way is the cornerstone of a European government, elected by a majority in Parliament. This eliminates the democratic deficit in today's EU and makes it possible to hold the government accountable, unlike today's Commission. Building a strong Parliament and creating a real European government also drastically reduces the need for the European Council and the Council of Ministers, as the powers of day-to-day European legislation are completely transferred from the Member States to elected parliamentarians. Therefore, Member States only need to be invoked in European politics if national competences, rights or integrity are affected or to be changed. In this way, the political system we want to see in the EU frees itself from harmful and selfish vetoes, while guaranteeing the integrity of the Member States.

Finally, we need to build a completely new political framework which, in the medium term, replaces the current interstate treaties with a genuine European Constitution. In such a constitution, the vertical division of powers between Member States and the European government can be regulated and institutionalised in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. The government and its ministers, in conjunction with the Parliament, could manage the powers defined in the Constitution much better and more democratically than the current Parliament and Commission. This would also create the conditions for democratic accountability of European leadership, which in practice is lacking today.

A European federation
A federal state appointed by the European parliament

Overall, our proposals entail a reform of the current EU into a European federation. We want to infuse the European Parliament with the competences and qualities that characterise national parliaments, thereby creating the democratic conditions required to build a federal state. Through this democratisation of European decision-making, we address the democratic deficit that currently prevents the EU from carrying out functions associated with state sovereignty. As the federal state is under the control of our directly elected MEPs, it can take over all the competences of today's Member States that can best be managed at the European level. This federal state thus has the democratic legitimacy required to conduct among other things a European defence and foreign policy. We therefore believe that a federal state is the only way for Europe to respond democratically to the geopolitical and global challenges we face, without allowing national interests to paralyse our actions.

Improving the current interstate EU decision making
Reforms are needed to urgently strengthen common action

To implement such fundamental reforms in the current EU political system requires unique constellations of political will that are so rare that they usually only arise as a direct result of crises. Even then, the time window for real reform is very narrow because political change in the member states occurs rapidly and in an asynchronous cycle. Therefore, a true European federation is far away. In the meantime, we want to propose some concrete measures that can be taken as preparatory steps before embarking on deeper reforms.

First, we recommend that the European Council and the Council of Ministers change their decision-making to qualified majority voting in all policy areas, without exception, and abolish national vetoes on all issues. As a consequence, member states' representatives will be freed from seeking the lowest common denominator. This current practice has proven to be insufficient in a world that requires rapid adaptation. It also encourages political decisions based on a common future rather than on national interest: no single country's interests can gather a majority on their own unless they also represent the majority of Europe, and even the largest Member States can be voted down. We see this mutual vulnerability as an important mechanism to maintain solidarity and to ensure the common interests in political decisions.

Secondly, we want the European Parliament to hold the Commission accountable if it does not fulfil its obligations to ensure that member states comply with laws and directives. We have seen, and still see, too many instances where member states directly ignore or openly circumvent common rules, not least on the Schengen area and internal border controls. If these infringements are not followed up by the Commission, Parliament should exercise its right to dismiss the respective Commissioners without hesitation. Furthermore, we want to implement the Spitzenkandidat system for appointing the Commission. This system is similar to the process of electing a real government with a parliamentary majority, instead of the current system that gives this task to the Member States and exposes it to their internal and interstate power games.

A federal Europe on the world stage
Europe must show initiative in tackling today's global issues

Our vision of the future of the EU, its new democratic governance and its entrusted powers, are not proposed for their own sake, but are carefully selected. We believe that the federal state described above has the potential to respond to the challenges facing our continent, with which we began. Here we evaluate those capabilities, in particular how our proposed changes will enhance a reformed EU's capabilities in the areas of defence, migration policy, global power dynamics and climate change.

A European army
Europe needs hard power to assert itself among the great powers

European states have a duty to ensure the security of their citizens and protect their own integrity from outside powers. Since it is impossible or impractical for individual European countries to do this themselves, there is only one option: a European army.

Today, the EU's military resources are spread across 27 different defence forces, with different equipment, standards and organisations. They are funded through fragmented and uncoordinated national investments, leading to widespread duplication and inefficiency. This means that EU military capabilities cannot currently be coordinated as a unified defence force, and these problems cannot be overcome by interstate cooperation alone - a formal structure for joint decision-making is required. In practice, therefore, it is not possible or even desirable to create a common defence force without first building the deeper political integration necessary to control it. With a federal European state, however, the political conditions exist to create a European military under democratic control.

Together, EU countries spend four times more on defence than Russia. In 2019, the total armed forces of EU countries amounted to 1.9 million personnel, compared to Russia's 1.4 million [27]. The EU has a well-developed and high-tech military industry, making it self-sufficient in military equipment. The EU also has the ability to establish its own nuclear umbrella with the French arsenal, to deter nuclear weapon states and reduce dependence on Nato's nuclear states. Thus, where individual member states lack the power to defend themselves, the EU collectively has the capacity to guarantee its security and that of all its citizens.

Today's EU possesses soft power through its internal market and diplomatic reputation. But in order to defend itself and its interests, and at the same time work towards the good of the world, it also needs hard power, which is lacking today. A European army would give the EU such hard power to resist aggression and threats from countries like Russia and to defend its democratic friends and allies around the world, such as Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Moldova and Taiwan. By standing on its own feet, Europe's dependence on the non-European members of Nato will be reduced. It would also allow the UN's military operations to be less dependent on the US military and for the EU to set up its own operations to maintain peace and counter terrorism around the world. It would also have more resources to proactively respond to

cyber-attacks and other influence operations that do not involve direct military confrontation, something individual EU countries often cannot do on their own today.

A common military force would also be more economically efficient than the 27 national militaries we have today. Much of the investment and expenditure between these 27 militaries is duplicated and wasted, and national militaries compete with each other on the market for military equipment. Just a simple thing like creating a common system for certifying ammunition is estimated to save EU countries €500 million per year. A fully integrated military force is estimated to save over €26300 million per year [28], over three times Sweden's annual defence budget.

A common asylum and migration system
A humane migration policy is possible

According to the UNHCR, in 2022 there were approximately 26 million refugees globally who have left their home country to seek asylum. Since the 2015 crisis and before the war in Ukraine in 2022, the annual asylum reception across the EU has been around 600,000 people [29]. 600,000 asylum seekers represent around 6 % of Sweden's population, and such a reception is obviously not sustainable in the long run - for Sweden or any other single European country. But 600,000 asylum seekers represent only 0.13 % of the EU population, and the four million Ukrainian refugees who have been granted protection in the EU represent only 0.9 % of the EU population. Thus, at the European level, asylum reception is not a major problem.

After a decade of constant but fruitless debates, it should be clear that there are no satisfactory solutions to asylum reception that can be accommodated within the national decision-making of European countries. The only tool available to national politicians has been to try to reduce their country's reception, resulting in asylum systems that cannot cope with the sudden stresses of refugee crises. National asylum systems were not sufficient to deal with the refugee crisis from the war in Ukraine and it took only eight days for EU countries to abandon these systems in favour of a common European solution through the Temporary Protection Directive. It is time to look beyond the national arenas and see the opportunities that exist through a deeper political integration of the EU, and a permanent European asylum system.

The EU has the capacity to organise a humane, efficient and sustainable asylum reception, in line with its international commitments and moral obligations. We want to build an asylum system with safe routes to Europe, rapid processing at the external borders, and a distribution system that ensures a proportionate level of reception across all Member States while prioritising the integrity of families. Refugees need to be protected for as long as there remains a risk in their home country, which can take decades, and therefore need to be integrated into society and have access to the entire European labour market as soon as possible. A common asylum system would have the capacity to scale up its operations in case of new refugee crises, something national systems cannot do. Distributing asylum seekers

across the EU solidarily and proportionally reduces the pressure on each individual member state.

The lack of a common asylum system also makes the EU and all Member States vulnerable to external actors using migrants as a weapon. Western analyses suggest that Russia is deliberately attacking civilian targets and infrastructure in Syria together with the Al-Assad regime to drive more refugees towards the EU [30]. Since 2021, Russia and Belarus have also been actively bringing migrants from the Middle East to the EU border in Poland, Latvia and Lithuania. Turkey has repeatedly tried to blackmail EU countries by threatening to withdraw from its agreements with the EU and stop blocking refugees and migrants from reaching Europe [31]. In all these cases, the absence of a common asylum policy is used to influence, blackmail or destabilise our countries and the EU as a whole. These actors can only be disarmed by building a sustainable European asylum system.

The truth is that Europe can help everyone who comes here. The only thing missing to build a permanent asylum system is political will. Proposals for common asylum systems within the EU are watered down and thwarted by national governments who put their own interests before the common ones, and who try to attract voters within their domestic constituencies. This lack of solidarity can only be overcome by fundamentally changing the rules on which European politics are conducted. Intergovernmental cooperation is simply insufficient to coordinate European politics, we need deeper political integration.

The same political integration is required to create a common policy for labour migration. At present, the EU's internal market is not being fully exploited to attract and employ migrants or refugees; this needs to change in order to address Europe's future labour shortages. Creating a European federation will automatically solve many of these problems. In a federation, it wouldn't matter which state a migrant lives and works in, they would only have to apply for a visa once to enter the EU, and if they want to apply for European citizenship, they wouldn't be restricted to a particular state, but would only have to stay within Europe's borders.

Values-based diplomacy and trade
The EU must use its soft power to promote democracy and human rights in the world

The EU's difficulty in coordinating a response to the complex challenges facing the global market is a direct consequence of the fact that trade is an exclusive EU competence and foreign policy is a national competence. The EU must act proactively to navigate the trade war between the US and China, defending international systems and free trade, while avoiding the security risks associated with dependence on authoritarian states. To do this, the EU must combine both trade and foreign policy, which is only possible through deeper political integration.

To stand up to the major powers, the EU must therefore act as an independent player on the international stage. This requires a unified foreign policy that can never be realised as long as Member States hold national vetoes, and as long as political decision-making is constrained by national interests. We must move beyond the requirement of unanimity and instead look to

the common interests of Europe. We believe that only a federal European state with a democratically elected government can do this.

A European federation and a true European government will allow the EU to navigate independently in the multipolar arena. We want to see an EU that combines its soft power and position as a trade giant with foreign policy to conduct value-based diplomacy that protects international systems and cooperation, promotes peace and fights for human rights in the world. We want to see an EU that consistently takes a stand against violations of international law, crimes against humanity and authoritarian states, and is not afraid to use its market and soft power to pursue these issues. Trade agreements should be made conditional on respect for human rights, and access to the European market should be used as an incentive to promote democratic development in the world. Europe should not be afraid to use sanctions to penalise violations of international commitments and to put pressure on authoritarian regimes. We believe that Europe needs to become a humanitarian superpower.

Leadership towards global climate neutrality
A European green transition can lead the way

Today, powerful and necessary climate reforms in the EU are limited by national thinking, national interests and a lack of solidarity in national decision-making. We know what needs to be done, but the political will is lacking, but the magnitude of the problem requires that we overcome these internal divisions. With European decision-making independent of national interests, a federal Europe could lead the way in the fight against global warming.

Europe's electricity supply must become fossil-free if we are to meet the necessary climate targets. The need for electricity will increase with the electrification of our societies and Europe is expected to need an additional 800 TWh already in 2030 compared to today [32]. A European federation opens the possibility for investments and projects on a European scale. Covering future needs and phasing out fossil fuels requires an integrated electricity grid, which in turn requires investments in physical infrastructure. European electricity production must also be expanded. This requires a joint investment in fossil-free electricity production, with a mix of renewable energy sources and nuclear power. Such an effort is also required to break Europe's energy dependence on authoritarian states. The importance of this has been emphasised after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Energy policy has been the main focus of the climate debate in recent years, but it is important to remember that overcoming global warming requires more than a fossil-free energy supply. We need to reduce emissions from transport, which requires investment in sustainable infrastructure. To support the electrification of cars, efforts are needed to expand the charging network across Europe. Intra-EU flights must be replaced by a network of high-speed trains. The buildings sector accounts for about 35 % of EU greenhouse gas emissions, mainly through the use of fossil fuels for heating [33] and about 75 % of EU buildings are not energy efficient [34]. Thus, there is great potential for a European initiative to make existing buildings more energy efficient, and to set stricter standards for future construction. Agriculture accounts for 11 % of EU greenhouse gas emissions [35], but this does not include emissions

from imports. Global demand for food is increasing in line with global population growth, and supply is affected by extreme weather conditions and geopolitical events. Therefore, the EU needs to become more self-sufficient and reduce its dependence on food imports, while reducing agricultural emissions. Investments are therefore needed to make European agriculture more efficient, sustainable and modern. All these examples require efforts that only a European federation would have the political and economic capital to coordinate and enable.

However, the biggest opportunity for climate action made possible by a European federation is linked to a common foreign policy. 90 % of the world's emissions occur outside the EU's borders, so it is not enough to reduce emissions only within the EU. A unified foreign policy opens up opportunities to combine diplomacy and the EU's enormous soft power as a trade giant to promote global climate neutrality. Trade agreements can be made conditional on compliance with the commitments of the Paris Agreement or other emission standards. They can also be made conditional on other forms of nature protection, such as measures against deforestation. By making climate protection a core foreign policy objective, the EU could thus promote a global green transition, something that individual member states are unable to do.

Concluding thoughts
A European perspective is lacking in our national discourse

Throughout this white paper, we have provided examples of issues that are too big for individual European countries to solve on their own, but that could be solved by a united Europe. We assert that this insight is lacking among national politicians, in Sweden and in the rest of the EU, which results in national decisions that oppose our common European interests. In order to truly tackle the big challenges of today, we need to move our decision making to the European level. However, the current state of the EU has created a democratic deficit that prevents such decision making. EU-sceptic politicians around Europe have correctly identified this democratic deficit when arguing about the supranationality of the EU. However, where EU-sceptic politicians want to address this deficit by dismantling EU institutions, Volt instead wants to address it through deeper democratisation and by putting EU-citizens at the core of European decision making. To ensure a democratic decision making that is capable of dealing with the big challenges our continent is facing, we are therefore arguing for reforming the EU into a European federation.

We see genuine European parties as a fundamental condition for democratic decision-making in a reformed EU. *Volt Europa* is an example of such a pan-European party. Volt was founded on the idea that politics bound by the national political arena only have a limited opportunity to address the challenges our societies are facing. Because of this, Volt is organising its politics on the European level. In the 2024 parliamentary elections, we are running on a common political programme in all the countries where we are active, with the intention of forming our own party group in the European Parliament. Our current MEP *Damian Boeselager*, although elected in Germany, represents all our members in all European countries. Our mandate is thus a European one, not a German one, as Volt's membership base as a whole can influence the behaviour of our MEPs, regardless of their nationalities.

Our reflections on the future of the EU are based on democracy and the need to reform our institutions to adapt them to the internal and external challenges we face. At present, Europe cannot ensure its strategic autonomy because our institutions and regulatory framework are not sufficient for effective implementation. On the contrary, today's interstate EU has a built-in strategic weakness due to the fact that Member States are the main political actors and have a veto power in critical policy areas. As long as we continue to conduct European politics in this way, we will never be able to achieve strategic autonomy or even pursue proactive politics. We will always be limited to reacting to events and will never be able to exert influence on events that will affect us in the future. We have seen that our common challenges - security, refugees, climate change, natural resources, science and technology - are many and sometimes seem insurmountable. We therefore believe it is high time to be proactive. Let's start shaping our future. Together.

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