



**27 Concessions to legitimize the EU
for the French Presidency
of the Council of the European Union**

The European Momentum

- White Paper -

Volt

Volt Europa

Fabiola Conti

Co-President Volt France



« In a changing world, where the challenges we face are taking more and more amplitude, the European Union needs to respond in a cohesive way, speaking with one voice. We have seen it with the coordination on the vaccines and with the spread of Covid-19: when we act together, we are stronger. The French Council Presidency is starting January 1st. Last time it happened in 2008, we were facing the biggest financial crisis of our time and Europe's ambitions were very different. The chance we have now is unprecedented: Volt France asks President Macron and his government to take responsibility and make use of this opportunity to lead the European Union into the future. We ask for a bolder, braver and more resolute European Union, who listens to its citizens and takes on responsibility internationally. »

Sven Franck

Co-President Volt France



« Despite its evolution, the EU is still led by its member states guiding it in 27 different directions that rarely coincide or sum up into actual progress. We are still far from the federal Europe and principles of subsidiarity which would translate into a powerful Europe on the global stage. France taking over the rotating EU Council Presidency is therefore a real chance for Europe. With the new German government's coalition showing the willingness to move forward to a federal union, France can become the driving force for European integration and making Europe an actor on the geopolitical stage. Volt France fully supports our president's ambitions for creating our European identity, relaunching our economy in a sustainable way - both with regards to Covid and climate change - and building up Europe's smart power as a sovereign entity. »

Damian Boeselager

MEP Volt Europa



« The French Council Presidency has a unique chance to advance on critical issues such as digitisation, European talent attractiveness and changing European democracy for the better. Germany's new governing coalition has set up ambitious plans for Europe. Together, France and Germany can start delivering results for Europeans. It will be imperative for France to listen to Europe's citizens during the concluding stages of the Conference on the Future of Europe and to deliver on their conclusions. Jointly, President Macron will be able to improve voting rights, make European political parties truly representatives of European citizens and fundamentally change the way we vote and for whom we vote in the European elections in 2024. Volt Europa calls on President Macron and his government to not waste this chance of improving and strengthening European democracy. »

About Volt

Only a Europe that acts together can solve our shared challenges. National parties are reaching their limits. To counteract populist promises and give a home to all Europeans, we created Volt: the first pan-European party.

We strive to empower people to change politics and unlock Europe's potential. Active in more than 30 countries with elected representatives on local, regional, national and European level, we encourage citizens to rethink and shape politics in their cities, in their countries and across borders in Europe.

We are pan-European, pragmatic and progressive. While striving to promote diversity, we come together because of our shared goals and values. We ask the necessary questions and make realistic proposals to solve pan-European challenges.

We work towards a united, federal Europe where everyone has equal chances to fulfil their unique potential. By uniting our strengths democratically, we strive to form a strong, responsible and transparent European government that acts in the interest of all Europeans. We believe in reforming Europe to build a true European democracy. We are working towards building a stronger European Parliament with the power of proposing new laws and electing a European Prime Minister that will be held accountable by all European citizens. We want to shape Europe into a society where the highest standards of human, social, environmental, and technical development are achieved. It's time for change, and **we are creating the new European future!**

Momentum

Introduction

On January 1st, 2022, France will take over the Council of the European Union, the rotating presidency that every six months asks a Member State to set strategic priorities to **move the EU forward**. And the EU needs to move forward, stalling would mean that Europe can only react: react to Covid as we struggle to coordinate responses on a European level and address vaccination on a global scale, react to other countries destabilizing Europe by exploiting our unwillingness and paranoia to a joint and humane answer to migration, react to our bilateral agreements being ignored because as individual Member States we are increasingly considered as pawns in global geopolitics.

Europe should not have to react, but **be an actor on the global political stage** and the Council presidency of France is an opportunity to write a new chapter of the European narrative. Our President has chosen the topics "Belonging", "Relance" and "Power" for France's six month term and all topics have the potential to change how the world and we, as Europeans think about the future of Europe. It is a great opportunity for **France to be a defining European actor and for our Council Presidency to be the defining moment** that orchestrates efforts across member states to build **European Momentum**.

To create this momentum, we gathered contributions from each of our 27 EU chapters that would **legitimize the European Union**. We asked for individual Member State **concessions on national level** in order not to have to touch EU treaties - a long term project and Pandora's box beyond the scope of a Council presidency. Instead, we wanted every country to provide one building block to solidify the fundament of the European Union. Volt France proposes this project to our president as **a future format for European integration during the rotating Council Presidency**. It gives purpose to the presidency setting positive examples to move the European project forward together.

How would this apply to the priorities defined by our President?

Belonging

A non-representative democracy that imposes hurdles and prevents new ideas from emerging in elections risks alienating citizens and does not create "belonging". Several Volt chapters propose **concessions to increase participation in elections on national level (Italy) or even letting the EU organise the European elections (Romania)**. The European Commission has put forward a review of the rules for mobile EU citizens to be able to stand and vote in local and European elections on 25 November 2021. Volt France therefore asks to address the fundamental issue of ensuring that **effective electoral rights are made compatible with the freedom of movement**. Concretely, we demand a reform of the legislation on existing rights and to extend them to regional and national elections and referendums. With the European Parliament set to publish a proposal for reforming the European elections next spring, we further ask the French government during the Council Presidency **to make the European elections as inclusive and democratic as possible** by creating a level playing field for parties, establishing a democratic code of conduct for selecting candidates, giving 16-year olds the right to vote, creating true European elections by establishing a second vote for pan-European lists and by reducing electoral thresholds. Our national democracy is battered by abstention on every election and democracy is getting more fragile every day. If "belonging" is the objective, enabling participation is the means to get us there. "Belonging" means every voice should be heard with the right to participate in elections and to be represented.

Recovery

For the time being, France seems to have found its pace with regards to responding to Covid. However, without a cohesive European effort, setbacks abroad will threaten any form of European recovery. **"Recovery" requires "Resilience"** - whether against Covid or against climate change and proposals regarding the latter aim at building this EU-wide resilience. Chapters proposing to **give up coal in return for European-wide energy supply (Czech Republic) or ceding control over its national railway to the EU (Portugal) in order to build the transnational rail network** we need to fulfill our Paris commitments are contributions with great leverage for the European project. Volt France demands to go even further and **define resilience on a global level**: the Covax programme to vaccinate the world is a great initiative that unfortunately flounders faced with reality. Donations of vaccines and deliveries lag far behind lofty commitment and Europe is no exception. Not only due to the rise of Omicron, Volt France demands to **ensure that Member States follow through with their renewed Covax commitments made for mid 2022**. We further ask France to push for Member States **waiving vaccine patents** to set the tone for a concerted global effort against the pandemic. France has the opportunity to position the European Union as the block that looks beyond its borders and for global resilience and the common good. First to tackle Covid. Then to respond to climate change.

Power

The European Union was built to ensure peace on the basis of economic cooperation. Our European single market freedoms: the free movement of citizens, goods, capital and the freedom to establish services. However, over time these four freedoms also affected many aspects far beyond economic integration and economic potential. Just as developments on a geopolitical scale, they require further integration. Proposals from chapters underline the need for **Europe to start speaking with a joint voice and offering our permanent seat in the UN security council (France)** to the EU should be the gold standard France is contributing during its lead of the Council Presidency. Other countries requesting an EU Foreign Minister by **giving up their national one (Germany)**, **sharing control over external European borders (Croatia, Cyprus, Greece) or contributing to a European army (Finland, Spain)** show how much the sentiment for intensifying cooperation on security matters is shared across the continent. Volt France therefore asks **France to concentrate its efforts on the European scale**. The invitation by Ursula von der Leyen in her state of the Union address to convene a national summit on European Defense will provide the background during the Council Presidency to initiate the discussion with Member States on how to further strengthen the EU's position and establish European "smart" power on a global level.

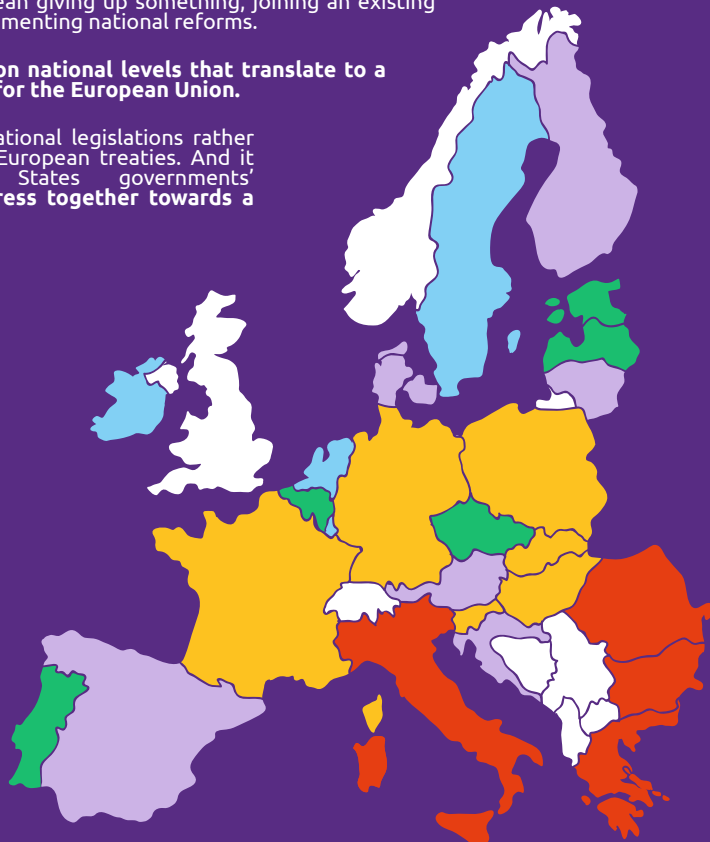
27 Concessions

We asked our 27 chapters to each name a concession that the next French Council Presidency should propose to their governments in a joint project to legitimize Europe.

A concession can mean giving up something, joining an existing EU initiative or implementing national reforms.

It's 27 small steps on national levels that translate to a giant leap forward for the European Union.

It means aligning national legislations rather than renegotiating European treaties. And it shows Member States governments' willingness to **progress together towards a federal Europe.**



Rule of Law

Give the French permanent Security Council Seat to the EU
Do not appoint a foreign minister
Introduce judicial reforms to align with European legislation
Join the European Public Prosecutor Office (EPPO)
Request the EU to directly distribute EU funds to beneficiaries
Ask the EU to finance and protect the independent press

France
Germany
Poland
Hungary
Slovakia
Slovenia

Finance

Publish tax rulings and adhere to the global corporate tax rate
Ask to be put on the blacklist of tax havens if warranted
Push for fair European taxes for companies
Join the EU Exchange Rate mechanism and vote on the Euro

Ireland
Luxembourg
Netherlands
Sweden

Climate

Adopt EU Commission's climate goals
Exit coal by 2030 even with temporary EU energy dependence
Cease logging in forests the EU can declare as protected
Grant EU authority over baltic waters to clear WW2 ammunition
Entrust control over its railway network to the European Union

Belgium
Czechia
Estonia
Latvia
Portugal

Democracy and Human Rights

Grant voting rights to non-EU citizens
Allow the EU to hold the 2024 European elections in Romania
Include ratification of the Istanbul Convention in judicial reform
Cede control over the green line to the EU
Cede control over European borders to the EU

Italy
Romania
Bulgaria
Cyprus
Greece

Security

Cede neutrality in case an EU member state is attacked
Ask for neutral EU support on the external Croatian border
Hold referendum on Danish Opt-outs
Commit 200 soldiers to the European Rapid Reaction Force
Join the Prüm Convention
Join the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)
Commit one battalion of the Military Emergencies Unit to the EU

Austria
Croatia
Denmark
Finland
Lithuania
Malta
Spain

Rule of law

Whether it is national borders being imposed during the Covid pandemic or Member States pursuing individual foreign policies, Europe is still far from being a political actor - both externally, representing the interest of its Member States - as well as internally, where Member States question the primacy of European legislation and treaties. The recent letters sent by the European Commission to Hungary and Poland criticising not only the independence of institutions but also flagging the lack of transparency with regards to use of EU funds highlight an additional need - the one for more oversight and the possibility of intervention from European level. A joint project to legitimize the European Union offers thus many angles both regarding strengthening Europe's external role and internal transparency.

France

Give the French permanent Security Council Seat to the EU

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the principal organs of the United Nations, charged with ensuring international peace. It can establish peacekeeping missions, enact international sanctions and authorize military actions. It is also the only UN body that can issue binding resolutions to member states. The Security Council has ten rotating members based on geographical regions as well as five permanent members with veto power - China, Russia, the United States, the United Kingdom and France, whose permanent status was granted based on their importance in the aftermath of World War II.

After Brexit, France is the only remaining EU member state with such a permanent seat in the security council. Volt France believes that giving this seat to the European Union is an opportunity to greatly enhance the EU's position as a legitimate actor on the global stage. Benefits are multiple: the EU would be on par with the USA, China and Russia; it would highlight the Union's role as a keeper of global peace and it would be a clear sign that France is willing to contribute to moving the European project forward. France can only learn from the recent Aukus affair and pick up on the invitation of EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen to lead an EU Summit on Defense to make the announcement in the beginning of its Council presidency.

Volt France therefore proposes for France to give up its permanent UN Security Council seat to the European Union as the French concession to legitimize the EU and flagship proposal for other countries to follow suit with similar contributions.

Germany

Do not appoint a foreign minister

As the USA and China are getting increasingly entangled in a strategic rivalry, constructive international cooperation on member state level is becoming more and more difficult. Europe must strive for strategic autonomy to fill the void left by the United States who are focusing their attention on the Indo-Pacific. However, at present, there is no coordinated common foreign policy of the EU member states: every state has its own foreign ministry, its own foreign policy and a de facto veto. One of Volt's objectives is for the European member states to pursue a common and democratically legitimized foreign policy which includes speaking with a united common voice to the outside world.

Fittingly, the new German coalition committed itself to an "actual" coordinated foreign policy in Europe - including security and defense - and to transition towards majority voting in the Council of the European Union concerning questions of joint foreign policy. Volt Germany demands the new coalition to make a first "factual" step in this direction by not appointing a new foreign minister, but to concede its individual foreign policy and ministry for the coordinated policy, envisioned by the new coalition government, and to merge it into a European Foreign Ministry. Volt sees the potential for each European country to use its respective foreign relations to Europe's advantage. Whether it is Croatia in the Balkan, or Denmark in the North Atlantic, our joint foreign policy should be conducted under the umbrella of a unified European Foreign Ministry.

In order to streamline foreign affairs governance, Volt Germany likewise calls for the full integration of the European External Action Service (EEAS) into the Commission and the replacement of the post of High Representative/Vice President (HR/VP) with that of a European Foreign Minister.

Poland

Introduce judicial reforms to align with European legislation

Since joining in 2004, and even before, the Polish society has been among the most pro-European populations in Europe. There is a vast Polish diaspora across Europe and beyond, living the European idea of free movement. Even today, as the Polish government is in a deadlock with the European Union, support for Europe remains strong both at home and abroad.

Based on this sentiment, Poland should be the country to take the European project forward into the future. Instead, the government is trying to reform Poland's institutions. From introducing a disciplinary chamber for judges and reducing the retirement age for replacing them to the constitutional court crisis in 2015 - reforms are undermining democratic principles and the division of power and put Poland at odds with the European Union. Volt Poland believes this is not the way forward and that a community of countries such as the European Union can only work if all member states adhere to democratic principles and common rules.

Volt Poland therefore proposes to the Polish government to rollback judicial reforms. This would mean canceling the disciplinary chamber of the highest court, dividing back the minister of justice and the national prosecutor into two separate positions, which are elected separately, and re-electing the members of the constitutional court to put it back on a democratic foundation. Volt Poland further proposes to revoke both the rulings on banning abortions and the primacy of Polish bills over EU treaties.

Hungary

Join the European Public Prosecutor Office (EPPO)

Hungary was one of two countries receiving letters questioning the independence of the judiciary, ineffective prosecution of corruption, and deficiencies in public procurement as precursors to triggering the process of funding cuts in case of rule-of-law breaches. In its letter, the Commission poses questions regarding beneficiaries of EU funds, pointing out that the bloc's anti-fraud office, OLAF, found that between 2016-2020, Hungary's financial recommendations in regional development and agriculture were almost eight times the EU average and that irregular projects were continued to be financed on national level. It also raised concerns that a large portion of EU funds was made available to the Prime Minister's close friends and family members. Whether on national or local level, corruption in public procurement seems widespread resulting in Hungary receiving one of the lowest scores on the EU corruption perception index.

Hungary is also one of the few EU member countries who did not join the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO), the institution to investigate and prosecute fraud against EU financial interests and misuse of EU funding. The institution is part of the Lisbon treaty. It was created, because OLAF, Eurojust and Europol lack the ability to act, leaving prosecution of these crimes to state authorities. Still, the Hungarian parliament has decided to not participate in the establishment of the EPPO citing sovereignty and national self-determination as reasons for opting merely to implement a working arrangement.

Volt Hungary believes oversight on use of EU funding in public procurement should not be only a domain of national prosecution - especially in countries which score low on the perceived corruption index. Hungary needs to provide more transparency on use of EU funds. Volt Hungary therefore proposes to the Hungarian government to join the EPPO to have a neutral and objective institution overseeing use of EU funding.

Slovakia

Request the EU to directly distribute EU funds to beneficiaries

Slovakia's reputation has been marred by corruption since the murder of an investigative journalist who was shot with his fiancée when researching corruption in the agriculture sector. After concluding administrative investigations into misuse of EU funds in 2020 and finding irregularities in direct payments and systemic weaknesses in national verification procedures, calls for the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) to further investigate possible corruption cases remain strong, for example with regards to abuse of land subsidies due to the fragmentation of land ownership in Slovakia.

As the misused European funding can both be distributed directly through the European Union or indirectly through national institutions, Volt Slovakia therefore proposes to the Slovakian government to ask that European funds be directly distributed to beneficiaries. The EU should be empowered to bypass national authorities until transparent processes, due diligence and legal conditions permit their involvement. In doing so, Volt Slovakia would like to set an example for other member states in which corruption and misuse of EU funding also is an issue.

Slovenia

Ask the EU to finance and protect the independent press

After almost a year without pay and only through an order from the Supreme Court, the Slovenian government resumed payment to its state-funded news agency STA, which was cut after covering a meeting between the Slovenian and Hungarian presidents. Deprived of the funding the government is legally obliged to provide and having lost numerous staff, the agency is today only a shadow of its former self left as apparent warning to other media outlets critical of the government.

It is also only one episode in a series of events threatening the independence of the Slovenian press. In the spring of 2021, numerous national newspapers and radio stations lost public funding after the installation of an expert commission predominantly staffed with members close to the ruling party and tasked with judging the medias' bids for financing. Journalists, critical of the government, are regularly threatened - the STA director was accused of murder, a journalist questioning the government's Covid-19 response and the investigator uncovering funneling of public money through advertising by public institutions (including the defense ministry) on alt-right media networks close to the government received death threats and saw their personal information being shared publicly on these outlets.

Volt Slovenia would therefore demand the Slovenian government to ask the European Union to provide funding for the Slovenian independent press. Further, Volt Slovenia would demands to request from the OSCE and the European Union to develop directives on journalist and whistleblower protection and to ensure they are implemented - these include defamation to be a civic offense only (compared to a criminal offense in Slovenia) and introducing anti SLAPP legislation to prevent retaliatory lawsuits.

Finance

With a reform on global corporate taxation having been launched on initiative by the United States, Europe, which had successfully carved out its version of continental capitalism, suddenly finds itself in the passenger seat of a reform according to the ideas of anglo-saxon capitalism. With also having a different interpretation in terms of solidarity - on a societal and Member State level, we need a strong Europe to ensure that our public systems remain funded - to not only provide the social services we all take for granted. This means looking at taxation from a European perspective and stopping trying to gain national advantages over our neighbouring Member States - a sentiment reflected in several proposals submitted by Volt chapters.

Ireland

Publish tax rulings and adhere to the global corporate tax rate

In 2016, the European Commission ordered Apple to pay 13B€ in unpaid taxes to Ireland. The Irish government rejected the payment and Apple appealed the verdict. In 2020, the EU General Court annulled the European Commission's decision for lack of giving selective advantage under EU state aid rules, which in turn is being appealed by the European Commission. While the final verdict is out, the numbers are a telltale sign: US controlled multi-nationals pay over 80% of Irish corporate taxes and employ 23% of the labor force when including the public, agriculture and finance sectors.

The tax rulings, criticized by the European Commission, are a problem beyond Ireland. Permitting authorities to give confidential agreements to selected companies on how much tax they are expected to pay creates an opaque environment, difficult to regulate. Calls for exchanging information about cross border tax-rulings have been voiced since 2003, but adoption of a model decided on in 2013 remains slow with many governments instead insisting these arrangements are subject to tax secrecy. Considering, that between 1990 and 2018, corporate tax rates in rich countries fell to 23% and the reform for a global tax rate will likely set the new upper limit to 15% only to be undercut by new tax rulings, Volt Ireland believes we need to take a step into a different, more sustainable and more transparent direction.

Volt Ireland therefore proposes to the Irish government to make all tax rulings public and to commit to not undercut the global minimum tax rate once it is introduced. With the UK leaving the EU, Ireland, as the only remaining English-speaking country, is the default bridgehead for anglo-american companies to enter into the European market. There are no more incentives required to choose Ireland over the UK and this propositions reflect that.

Luxembourg

Ask to be put on the blacklist of tax havens if warranted

With the recent "Base erosion and profit shifting" (BEPS) scheme now supported by over 140 countries and a new two-pillar plan to reform international taxation rules for fairer distribution of profits and taxing rights, as well as a floor on competition over income tax slated for implementation by 2023, the global community is working to establish a new common standard for international taxation. Finding this common ground is urgently needed as our public services and financial means are being strained not only with fighting Covid, but also by financing the transition to more sustainable models of society.

It also means Luxembourg has to step up its efforts. After the "OpenLux" papers revealed in 2021 that the country was hosting over 140 000 companies (a third of them financial holdings) and managing assets worth 6.5 trillion euros, it is evident that, although reforms are underway, Luxembourg still has to be considered a tax haven. When the previous "Luxembourg Leaks" were revealed in 2017, the European Union introduced a "black list of tax havens" in an attempt to fight tax fraud, evasion and money laundering. Being put on this list of non-cooperative jurisdictions for tax purposes and not complying with OECD standards proved very efficient in triggering reforms in several countries. However, due to geopolitics, the United States (Delaware) and Turkey are not on the list. Even worse: all EU member states are excluded as well, making the moral high ground, on which Europe is putting itself at least questionable.

The European parliament acknowledged these shortcomings and voted in 2021 for the blacklist to become more stringent with regards to its criteria - yet, it seems unlikely that EU member states will be blacklisted in the near future. Volt Luxembourg therefore proposes to the Luxembourg government to objectively assess Luxembourg and to be blacklisted if it is warranted. Volt Luxembourg further asks their government to demand the same from our European partners and to push for unequivocal inclusion of all countries.

Netherlands

Push for fair European taxes for companies

In 2019, the European Parliament declared the Netherlands a tax haven (just like Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta and Cyprus). Therefore, for a few years now, the European Commission has been examining and sometimes condemning tax agreements that Member States have made with multinational companies. The Commission will propose a new framework for company taxation in the EU in 2023. This framework will reduce administrative burdens, remove tax obstacles and create a more business-friendly environment in the single market. The current proposal for a Common Consolidated Corporate Tax Base (CCCTB) will be withdrawn and replaced by "Business in Europe: Framework for Income Taxation" (BEFIT).

BEFIT will provide common rules for determining the corporate tax base and for allocating profits between Member States based on a predefined formula. BEFIT would consolidate the profits of EU members of multinationals into a single tax base, which would then be allocated to Member States using a formula that would replace the current transfer pricing rules. The formula will be developed by taking into account issues such as the appropriate weighting of sales by destination, a reflection of the importance of the market in which a multinational group does business, assets (including intangibles) and labour (personnel and wages). Once allocated, profits will be taxed according to the common principles of an EU corporate tax base.

The commitment of Volt Nederland is focusing on defending a minimum rate and actively supporting the development of the BEFIT regulation. This means that the Netherlands will not ask itself which rate we would accept as a European profit tax for multinationals, but which rules should be harmonised between all European countries (there are more tax benefits than just corporate income tax) and actively discuss with other member states what they find an acceptable rate for this tax. In addition, the Dutch efforts will focus on which benefits should be abolished per Member State and make efforts to make these binding within the regulation.

Sweden

Join the EU Exchange Rate mechanism and vote on the Euro

Sweden has been a member of the European Union since 1995 and is obliged through the accession treaty to adopt the euro once the country meets the defined convergence criteria. However, in 2003, a referendum was held on membership in the eurozone in which 55.9% voted not to adopt the euro and while most major parties believe that it would be in the national interest to join, they abide by the result of the referendum. Since then, Sweden has chosen to not become a member of the EU's Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM II) as introducing the Euro would require at least a two year membership.

This puts Sweden in the odd situation of having to implement EU directives and using euro denominations alongside its own currency. Research also indicates that the entry of Sweden into the eurozone would have a positive effect as Swedish money market rates already closely follow the euro rates (including in times of crisis) and the country could swap autonomy on paper for a seat and a say in the ECB's governing council. In addition, when weighing national economic policy against a stronger integrated Europe, Sweden also needs to include changes in the global geopolitical landscape to find its long term direction. Faced with global challenges, the European Union will have to evolve into a more cohesive Union and tighter integration in many areas including its joint currency.

When applying this long term perspective that looks beyond Sweden's national borders and interests, Volt Sweden believes that it is time to position Sweden as one of the countries at the core of the European project and to exert our influence from within the monetary Union rather than from the sidelines. Volt Sweden therefore proposes to the Swedish government to apply for ERM II membership after holding a vote in parliament to join the euro as Sweden's concession to strengthen the European Union in the long term.

Climate

The latest GIEC report sounded the warning bells that we do not do enough to limit global warming, yet the recent COP26 proved to be yet another instance of individual countries making lofty commitments with concrete steps unlikely to follow. Committing to halting deforestation is one thing, actually doing it, as the European Commission requested from Poland and Estonia is a different story that often has to be fought out in court. We need a stronger Europe and cooperation across our borders - as well as beyond -, if we want to mitigate the risks of climate change. Several Volt chapters accordingly proposed concessions that reflect the sentiment that no country alone can be successful in curbing global CO2 emissions, but that by empowering Europe, we can start to make a difference.

Belgium

Adopt EU Commission's climate goals

Fifty years ago, Belgium was a unitary state with a single parliament and government. Today it is a mix of governments and parliaments based on geographical regions, as well as on communities bound together by language and culture. Because of this institutional make-up, national positions require coordination between several ministerial entities: the federal level and five regional governments. While this may be acceptable in some cases - after all, Belgium remained functional without a national government for a record 589 days after the 2010 elections - there are instances where the lack of a national position may also pose difficulties, such as fulfilling commitments in international agreements. For example, during the COP26 conference, Belgium did not arrive at a consensus national position to support more ambitious goals for reducing emissions, leaving Belgium as one of the few countries without an answer to one of the most pressing issues of our time.

Belgium, with its failure to agree on a decision, has consistently abstained on very important Council discussions on climate affairs. Volt Belgium would therefore call on the Belgian government to subscribe to the European Commission's climate goals and reach a positive position in DGE on climate affairs. We call on the Flemish Government to cede its opposition to stricter climate goals, so that we can jointly commit to climate adaptation and mitigation in line with the Paris goals.

Czech Republic

Exit coal by 2030 even with temporary EU energy dependence

The Czech Republic exports around one quarter of the electrical energy it generates every year, making it the fourth largest net exporter of electricity in the EU. But around 40% of the electrical energy produced in Czechia comes from burning coal. This means Czechia is the second most coal-dependent country in the EU. It is also one of the last EU member states with neither a plan to phase coal out nor an end-date set.

Czechia's strong exporter position frames national discussions about its energy transition, which center around self-sufficiency in production. As Czechia exports less electricity than it generates by burning coal, however, its net exporter status is unsustainable and the focus on energy self-sufficiency has become an obstacle to the energy transition: a chimera rather than a reasonable goal for the coming decades.

Volt Czechia therefore proposes to the Czech government to end all coal-fired electric generation by 2030 - even at the cost of conceding its energy independence. The climate crisis requires a transition away from fossil fuels in the shortest possible time frame and this problem cannot always be solved at the scale of individual states. Instead, Volt Czechia calls for a joint EU energy initiative that would provide a stable supply of low-cost electrical energy through an integrated European smart energy grid. This EU-scale solution would guarantee the energy needs of countries like Czechia that commit to ambitious reductions in their dependency on coal to facilitate Europe's energy transition. Such an initiative must also include financial resources to support countries in increasing their renewable energy production in the medium term.

Estonia

Cease logging in forests the EU can declare as protected

In June of this year, the European Commission launched infringement proceedings against Estonia in relation to illegal logging in Natura 2000 sites - core breeding and resting sites for threatened species. The activities of Estonia's Environment Ministry permitting illegal logging directly breach the EU's measures for protecting forests, particularly the requirements and principles of the EU Habitats Directive. In addition, Estonia refused to suspend or considerably decrease logging in Natura 2000 sites for the duration of the infringement proceedings despite increasing backlash from both Estonian constituents and NGOs.

Against this backdrop, the European Commission is working on its forest protection strategy for 2030, using the forests covering Europe as "carbon sinks" and protecting them from global warming and human activity. In doing so, it will have to find a balance between environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainable forest management and ensure better monitoring of Europe's forests. The European Parliament already approved a resolution on the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 to put under protection the remaining European old-growth forests and to establish a temporary moratorium on logging until they are put under protection.

Volt Estonia is conscious of the importance that our forests have for both our biodiversity and climate change mitigation. Volt Estonia therefore demands from the Estonian government and its environmental ministry to ask the EU to predetermine all old-growth forests to be protected on Estonian territory and to commit to stop logging in these forests immediately as well as applying the EU Timber Regulation (EUTR) on any wood coming from these forests.

Latvia

Grant EU authority over baltic waters to clear WW2 ammunition

There are many sites along the European coast where conventional and chemical munitions were submerged after the world wars. Since corroded metal components are supposed to last a maximum of 100 years, there is an increasing risk of our ecosystems being exposed to chemical agents dissolving into the sea, destroying marine life by poisoning fish species and endangering our fishing industry. The warfare agents came from the German Army: after Germany's defeat, the Soviet Union dumped the captured chemical weapons in the Baltic Sea. The British and Americans did the same in the Skagerrak strait, between Norway and Sweden to the north and Denmark to the south. At the time, this disposal method was deemed less hazardous than burning the materials.

Studies suggest the Soviets jettisoned at least 50,000 metric tons (t) of German weapons into the Baltic Sea, some 15,000 t of which contained chemical agents. According to some projections, bomb casings will disintegrate in the coming 10 years, while shell casings will corrode by 2100. Measurements around dump sites already detected sulfur mustard, arsenic-containing agents and hydrogen-cyanide and breakdown products contaminating areas up to 1km depending on sea currents. These remnants also pose a direct threat on the shores. On the Līpāja beach it is already risky to collect amber-like stones as they may very well be phosphorus that will ignite once dried and in contact with air.

Volt Latvia is aware that cleaning up the remaining ammunition sites will require a collective effort across Europe. Volt Latvia would demand from the Latvian government to grant the EU authority over the Baltic sea shorelines and request its neighbouring countries to do the same together with launching an initiative to recover ammunition and its contained biological and chemical agents.

Portugal

Entrust control over its railway network to the European Union

Considering railway transportation is hailed as one of the levers to reduce emissions and get us on track towards reaching the goals of the Paris Accord, the current modal share of passenger (7%) and freight (12%) traffic of total kilometers travelled in Europe leaves a lot of room for improvement. With decades of railway spending cuts and favoring car traffic, the Portuguese railway system today is in the lowest European tier with regards to safety, intensity of use and value for money. However, Portugal has begun to shift gears with their programme Ferrovia 2020 during the 2021 European year of Rail and is investing 2B€ to modernize its railway infrastructure.

But is it enough? The European Union has big railway ambitions but national carriers focus primarily on domestic markets and limiting competition. Railways use four different voltage levels as well as different gauges, ticket systems are incompatible across borders just as refunds also stop at frontiers. More importantly, night trains and high-speed lines along the Ten-T corridors will never become an alternative to air travel as long as jet fuel and airline emissions remain tax-free.

Volt Portugal would therefore like to make a big step towards European integration of its railway network and propose to the European Union to take over responsibility for its national railway network. This would give Europe direct control over adapting and investing towards interoperability. It would also change the scope of network evolution to connecting a Europe of regions instead of limiting oneself to national borders. If railway is ever to develop into the primary mode of transport across Europe, Volt Portugal believes it needs to be the European Union who is in charge of this European railway network.

Democracy

Both within our European borders and beyond, we are currently failing to live up to our values with regards to human rights. It has taken the 2015 refugee crises and its ongoing aftermath to highlight the need for a joint solution on migration that is both solidary with "frontline" Member States and that treats everyone who arrives according to the standards we would want to be treated with. Free movement is a reality today prompting many proposals that not only address migration, but also adapting national electoral systems in order to take citizens' voices into account regardless of their origin.

Italy

Grant voting rights to non-EU citizens

In 2003, the European Parliament called for Member States to grant voting rights in local elections to non-EU citizens who have been regularly residing in the EU for at least three years. Almost 20 years later, Europe is still far from this reality. Slovenia and Ireland have given non-EU citizens voting rights without a minimum residence duration, while the Scandinavian countries, as well as Lithuania, Estonia, Slovakia, the Netherlands and Belgium have introduced voting rights based on residing in the country from three to five years. In all other EU Member States, including Italy, many first generation immigrants are still today excluded from participating in elections in countries they have often been living in for decades.

In Italy, this means approximately 3.7 million non-EU citizens - an estimated one million of them having been born in Italy - are excluded from giving their vote, having their voice heard and their needs addressed by a political representative. In the absence of national legislation, several Italian cities such as Rome, Venice, Bologna and Genoa have opted for local regulations, allowing non EU citizens to vote in local elections. However, the Italian government has sought the annulment of these regulations before the administrative courts and the Council of State (the supreme administrative court in Italy) has confirmed that these types of regulations could not be implemented on local level, but would require constitutional change while at least recognising the need to grant voting rights to non EU citizens.

Volt Italy therefore proposes to the Italian government to finally take the necessary steps in order to allow mobile-EU and non-EU citizens that have been regularly residing in Italy for at least three years the right to vote in local elections. In a European continent and a world, which is moving, we cannot divide our societies into first and second class citizens and grant political representation to one why and not the other.

Romania

Allow the EU to hold the 2024 European elections in Romania

Although all EU member states elect members to the European Parliament, electoral legislation differs from country to country with all of them posing hurdles for new parties to qualify for running in the elections. Some of these hurdles effectively exclude smaller parties from participating. To be electable, you have to either have a lot of money (France, Italy), spend years fighting for your right in front of a court to exist as a party (Romania, Bulgaria) or collect insane amounts of signatures (Italy, Denmark). All of these rules massively impede political innovation and competition and add unnecessary and undemocratic hurdles to the democratic process.

New political and citizens' movements have grown in the recent past, but they have no chance to run for European elections. Barriers to entry are incredibly high, preventing many from expressing their new political ideas in the European Parliament. Article 39 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights grants every EU citizen the right to vote and stand as a candidate in the European elections and the European treaties impose reciprocity for European (and local) elections. But the reality is different on the ground.

Volt Romania therefore proposes to the Romanian government to ask the European Union to organise the 2024 European elections in Romania according to the rules to be proposed in March 2022. Volt Romania wants to ensure that citizens have equal rights of candidating and being represented in the European Parliament. The Romanian government can therefore set an example as well as a precedent by allowing the European Union to hold the European parliament elections in Romania.

Human Rights

Bulgaria

Include ratification of the Istanbul Convention in judicial reform

Bulgaria is one of the few remaining EU Member states, that has not ratified the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. The Constitutional Court in 2018 justified its decision with the Constitution only recognizing the term "sex" instead of "gender" with a third of the Court members not agreeing with this interpretation. The decision created not only legal uncertainty regarding the country's human rights obligations with respect to other treaties, but also poses difficulties on how to apply it to the previously common practice of legal gender recognition for transgender persons. With the verdict and its real motives still unclear, Bulgaria is self-isolating itself from the international community while aggressions have become part of everyday life at home and in public. Urgent legislative changes are needed considering a femicide every other week and at least one in four women in Bulgaria have experienced domestic violence. However, neither is the Domestic Violence Protection Act consequently enforced in court, nor is there adequate protection for victims of gender-based violence or effective prosecution of perpetrators.

In the run-up to the 2018 verdict, smear campaigns against Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have also increased, led by a campaign against gender organisations but also including promoting anti-EU propaganda and actions stigmatizing human rights groups. They continue to be directed against EU values and put at risk the pro-European development of Bulgaria since joining the European Union in 2007.

Volt Bulgaria therefore demands the Bulgarian government to ratify the Istanbul Convention in the national judicial reform to align Bulgaria with the remaining European countries with regards to respecting shared values on human rights in general and protection from violence against women and domestic violence specifically. Volt Bulgaria further proposes to not have a political representative be selected for the Grevio monitoring group, but instead concede to the European Union the appointing of a member, for example from the aforementioned Civil Society Organisations, once Bulgaria qualifies for participation.

Cyprus

Cede control over the green line to the EU

As Europe struggles to find a pan-european and balanced solution to migration, the EU continues to let itself be put into a corner - whether it is in Belarus, Greece or Cyprus. In the case of Cyprus, the situation has been deteriorating for some time because of illegal migrants crossing the green line (the legacy of the 1974 ceasefire after a Turkish invasion following a brief Greek-backed coup) which bisects the island of Cyprus into a Turkish Cypriot north and internationally recognised Greek Cypriot south. Currently, about 4% of the roughly 1 million inhabitants of Cyprus are asylum seekers - far above the European average of 1%. Five years into the EU-Turkey accord, which remains a humanitarian stain on the EU's human rights record and with neither a coherent EU return policy to send back rejected asylum seekers nor pan-european backing for the common asylum and migration pact that Brussels is preparing, Cyprus is forced to consider suspending asylum procedures for persons entering Cyprus illegally.

In light of this context, Volt Cyprus || Neo Kyma proposes to the Cypriot government to cede control over the green line border to the European Union - including handling of refugee and asylum seekers in accordance with EU policy and using the EU funds provided to Cyprus for doing so. A stronger European Union should also be responsible for Europe's external frontiers. By making this bold concession and hopefully also setting an example for other EU member states, Europe is empowered "step-by-step" or "country-by-country" to share or take over responsibility of its external borders, including setting up systems that allow pre-registration and evaluation of asylum seekers long before they reach European shores.

Greece

Cede control over European borders to the EU

Greece has been in the spotlight of a crisis that has seen many people seeking refuge in Europe since the summer of 2015. Due to the fact that it shares borders with Turkey, a country next to Middle East countries, it is the first stop for many people on their trip towards Europe. The current legal framework leaves the initiative of actions to the member states without a European perspective. After the Dublin regulation and in the wake of the migration and refugee crisis of 2015, thousands of people have been trapped in Greece in humiliating conditions, on the islands as in the mainland. At the same time, the current Greek government does not provide real help to these people to either be integrated into the Greek society or relocated to an EU member state where their family members already reside.

This situation only worsened last year, when it became evident that the Greek government ordered their coastguard to push-back asylum-seekers to the Turkish shores in the Aegean Sea. This is not just a violation of international law and human rights, it is also an embarrassment to our common European values and to the Greek history of welcoming refugees.

Volt Greece calls for a fair package of actions that will engage all the European countries. There must be measures that will make sure there is a legal way to migrate to Europe for people fleeing from war zones or places of the world that become unbearable to live. A fair system of relocation of those people must be put in place. Simultaneously, a holistic approach of encouraging the integration of those people to local communities is also necessary if we want to tackle racism and xenophobia. Greek sea and land borders are not just national borders, but they mark the southeastern gateway of the EU. Volt Greece therefore proposes to the Greek government to cede control over their external borders of the Europe Union : a EU responsible for watching our common external borders is the first step towards creating a sentiment of togetherness and closer cooperation.

Security

The world seems to enter into a new phase of uncharted geopolitical territory with the roles of the United States and China rapidly changing and Europe having to quickly learn how to stand on its own feet and speak with one voice. Europe needs “smart power”: using its trademark soft power while consciously and strategically developing hard power capabilities. Both require Member States to be on the same page which is difficult with neutrality clauses, military non-alignment and opt-outs from common defense often overlooked in discussions of European defence. Proposals from Volt chapters that fall into the security and defense category subsequently aim at aligning our efforts and making the first steps towards establishment of a European Army.

Austria

Cede neutrality in case an EU member state is attacked

Austria is committed to permanent neutrality of its own accord within the Austrian State Treaty and its “Declaration of Neutrality” from 1955 including not joining any military alliances and not permitting the establishment of any foreign military bases on its territory. However, since becoming an EU member in 1995, Austria did join the NATO Partnership for Peace program and contributed peace-keeping forces to KFOR in Kosovo (under NATO command) to EUFOR/SFOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina (led by the European Union) as well as UNIFIL in Lebanon (led by the United Nations).

With the signature of the Lisbon Treaty in 2007, all member states committed to aid a fellow member in case of an attack on its territory. The provision on not prejudicing the security and defence policy of certain member states is known as the “Irish clause” and gives non-aligned EU member states, such as Austria, an opt-out from EU mutual defence in case of an attack. For Volt Austria, the question is whether Austria would really remain neutral in case a fellow member state was attacked and if not, to what extent other EU member states could count on the aid of the Austrian armed forces. Volt Austria believes that providing, at a minimum, logistical support in military operations in case of an attack is a valid contribution to a European defensive effort. It will require granting passage through and logistical capacities on Austrian territory as well as the investment to modernize our military forces to be up to the task. It is a concession on neutrality to ensure other EU member states can defend our common external borders. And it is an example for other non-aligned member states to also reconsider their position regarding their respective definitions of neutrality.

Volt Austria therefore suggests to the Austrian government to cede neutrality, if the EU requires logistical assistance in the case of a member state being attacked.

Croatia

Ask for neutral EU support on the external Croatian border

With extension talks in the Balkans stalling, regional clashes and democracy at risk in several ex-Yugoslavian countries, Croatia’s position at the frontline of Europe and its role as an appealing presence on the Balkan will become more and more important. Croatia is advancing European integration with accession to the Schengen zone scheduled for 2024 and introduction of the euro in 2023. Still, the shadows of past conflicts loom over the Balkan and the European Union needs to ensure that none of its Balkan member states are drawn into potential conflicts.

Volt Croatia would therefore propose to the Croatian government to share responsibility over national borders by asking the European Union for support to ensure neutrality and security from conflicts but also in handling migration. This would be the contribution of Croatia in a joint project where all EU member states help strengthen the European Union.

Denmark

Hold referendum on Danish Opt-outs

In principle, the EU legislation is valid across all twenty-seven member states. However, some states have negotiated exceptions (called “opt-outs”) from specific legislation or treaties. Denmark has three of these opt-outs: Denmark chose to not adopt or be legally bound to the Euro, the Edinburgh agreement of 1992, and the Treaty of Amsterdam from 1997 exempt Denmark from participating in the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and the Lisbon Treaty in 1997 granted the right to convert an opt-out on freedom, security and justice into a flexible opt-in.

Over the last 15 years numerous referendums have been announced by subsequent governments regarding the removal of these opt-outs. However only two have been held. In 2000, the Danish population voted against adopting the Euro (53.2% to 46.8%) and in 2015, the flexible opt-in on freedom, security and justice was rejected (53.1% to 46.9%). A lot has happened since 2015: Brexit, the refugee crisis, the election of Donald Trump in the US and his proposal to purchase Greenland as well as the void left by the United States on the global stage.

Volt Denmark believes that the European Union needs to step into this void and uphold peace and security on the continent. However, we are still far from being able to follow in the footsteps left and one obstacle on the way is the lack of EU member states contributing to a joint defense and security effort. Volt Denmark would therefore propose to the Danish government to hold referendums on revoking the opt-outs on Defence and Freedom, Security and Justice, and to endorse voting for Denmark joining the European Common Defence and Security projects.

Finland

Commit 200 soldiers to the European Rapid Reaction Force

Finland has obligatory military service, a big reserve army and is above EU average with regards to military spending as a percentage of GDP - however, Finland has maintained a policy of neutrality since the end of the Second World War and is one of five EU member states that still consider themselves neutral. The definition of neutrality varies: in 2006, the Finnish Prime Minister stated that "Finland is a member of the EU. We were at one time a politically neutral country, during the time of the Iron Curtain. Now we are a member of the Union, part of this community of values, which has a common policy and, moreover, a common foreign policy." In November 2021, the Finnish President called for creating a holistic security policy for the EU with capacities for both civilian and military action. Thus far this neutrality has still been maintained in practise, despite words to the contrary.

The European Strategic Compass proposes the creation of a European Rapid Reaction Force, a 5000 soldiers contingent for rapid deployment in case of crisis. Volt Finland believes this creates an opportunity for Finland to contribute to a joint European defence force. Previous attempts to create a military force for the EU, like the EU battlegroups have not been very successful. Part of the issue has been the non-permanence of these battlegroups that are set up for a period of only 6 months before being disbanded (each national contingent returning to their original country).

Volt Finland, therefore, suggests to the Finnish government to commit a permanent contingent of at least 200 soldiers to the European Rapid Reaction Force proposed in the new European Strategic Compass. While this would not change Finland's official stance on neutrality, it would show Finland's commitment to common European security.

Lithuania

Join the Prüm Convention

The Prüm Convention (often inaccurately called Schengen III agreement) is a law enforcement treaty initially signed by seven member states in 2005. It was created outside of the European Union but is open to all EU countries to join. The fourteen member states who currently have signed the treaty have committed to more cross-border cooperation, particularly for combating terrorism and cross-border criminality. The convention enables signatories to exchange data regarding DNA, fingerprints or vehicle registrations but also to deploy sky marshals or permit joint police patrols between member states, entry of armed police in another member state for hot pursuits and cooperation in case of disasters. By signing the convention and treaty, Lithuania would be in a much better position with regards to cross-border cooperation, particularly for combating terrorism and cross-border crime. Considering the current situation on the border with the (...)

(...) Belarussian state, the illegal trafficking of asylum seekers into Belarus and attempts to enter the European Union as well as smuggling from illegal materials make joining the Prüm convention all the more relevant.

Volt Lithuania therefore wants to propose to the Lithuanian government to join the Prüm convention and suggest to its neighbouring Baltic states to do the same in order to intensify the cooperation with Latvia and Estonia.

Malta

Join the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)

The EU established its Common Security and Defence Policy over two decades ago and has over the last few years considerably stepped up its efforts with regards to defence. The unstable situation following the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, Donald Trump's election in 2016 and the UK leaving the European Union in 2020 are reshuffling the cards of global geopolitics and are forcing the hand of Europe. Initiatives such as Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and the European Defence Fund are first attempts at increasing cooperation in the defensive sphere and also aim to build a sense of military solidarity across the continent. The idea is for the EU to become a stronger geopolitical actor by increasing its 'strategic autonomy' – its capacity to act independently and to safeguard its interests in the international realm.

However, Malta remains one of the two member states that have not joined PESCO. Malta does not object to development of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and the creation of deployable military forces is part of the Armed Forces of Malta Strategy Paper for 2020-2026. Considering the rather pragmatic interpretation of neutrality, Volt Malta believes that Malta would benefit from its armed forces having the opportunity to participate in the various projects and training activities. For the EU it would mean its southernmost border in the Mediterranean could be included in joint defensive efforts. Volt Malta would therefore demand the ruling party have Malta join PESCO.

Spain

Commit one battalion of the Military Emergencies Unit to the EU

As one of the first countries in Europe, Spain, under proposal of the Council of Ministers in 2005 and legally established under Royal Decree 416 of 2006, created the Disaster Relief Military Unit (UME). Its missions fall into a broad range of interventions from emergencies caused by natural hazards such as floods, fires and earthquakes to technological hazards, such as chemical, nuclear, radiological and biological attacks or accidents. The UME is available to help in emergencies from terrorist attacks including against critical infrastructures or ABC agents. The highly specialised military force consists of six battalions (five of intervention and one transmission battalion) and a total of 3,500 troops from the Army, Navy, Air Force and Royal Guard. Since its inauguration, it has garnered significant attention and prestige due to its national and international deployments for disaster relief.

For this reason, and foreseeing greater dynamism and manoeuvrability throughout the European territory, Volt Spain proposes to the Spanish government to permanently commit at least one UME Intervention Battalion (BIEM) to the European Union as one starting block for the foundation of a joint European Army. This battalion will have integrated the Training Plan for Disaster Relief Military Units (FORUME), a mechanism through which the UME offers a comprehensive solution for the training of new military emergency units. This will help countries, upon request, to be able to set up this type of unit to address more local issues.

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The European Momentum

**27 Concessions to legitimize the EU
for the French Presidency
of the Council of the European Union**

- White Paper -

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