

02. June 2024

Ursula von der Leyen, the EPP lead candidate for the Presidency of the European Commission, at a campaign event in Plovdiv, Bulgaria.

Dear Johannes Winkel, dear Leopold Born,

Dear Boyko,
dear Manfred,

dear friends from GERB,

and of course dear candidates for the European elections,

It is great to be here in Plovdiv with you all!

And I feel particularly honoured to speak to you

on the Day of Commemoration of your national hero Hristo Botev

who died yesterday almost 150 years ago.

The poet, who fought, lived and died for the freedom and independence of Bulgaria.

Thank you, dear friends,
that I can be here with you on this special day!

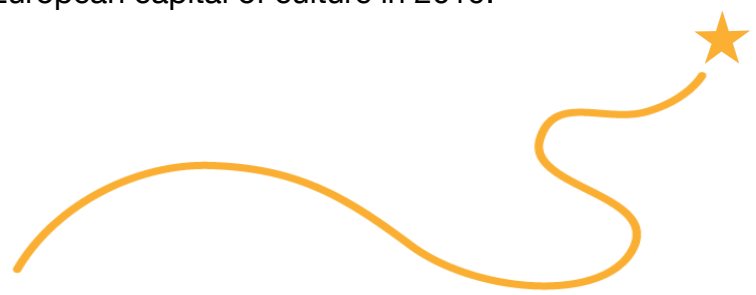
It's a Roman amphitheatre of breathtaking beauty in which we are meeting tonight.

This amphitheatre has been a marvellous spectator of history throughout the ages.

And it's a proof that people have always been longing for art and culture.

I was also impressed to see today how ancient and diverse Plovdiv is.

Plovdiv was the first Bulgarian city to become European capital of culture in 2019.



That's an achievement you all can be very proud of!

In September 2019
Bulgaria was one of my first visits
as designated President of the European Commission.

I still have very fond and vivid memories of my of my visit to Bulgaria in 2019.

Boyko told me the proud story of the tolerance of the Bulgarians.

And a powerful symbol of that .
is in the very heart of the city centre of Sofia:

Within 1 square kilometre
There is an orthodox church,
a synagogue,
a mosque
and a catholic church.

All side by side!

This symbolizes Bulgaria and Europe's strong spirit of tolerance.

But we also know that this has not always been the case.

This is why our founding fathers and mothers enshrined the European values in our treaties.

But today these values are under attack again,
by populists, extremists, and demagogues.

Whether it is the extremists from the far left or from the far right.

Whether it is the AfD in Germany,
the Rassemblement National in France, Confederatia in Poland or Vazrazhdane here in
Bulgaria.



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The names may be different, but the goal is the same:

They want to trample on our values, and they want to destroy our Europe.

But we, the EPP, will never let that happen.

Because “United we stand strong!”

Dear friends,

“United we stand strong!” was the motto of the BG Council Presidency in 2018.

And “Together” was also the motto of Plovdiv as Bulgaria’s first European Capital of Culture.

And about our European “Together”, I would like to speak tonight.

When we act together,
when Europe is united,
we can move mountains.

For a strong Europe.

The Bulgarian national hero Hristo Botev told us once:

“He who falls while fighting to be free,
can never die.”

Freedom, independence and sovereignty have always been the dream and longing of people.

And today this is true particularly for the people in Ukraine.
From Bulgaria, it does not take long to get to the Ukrainian border.

I have crossed that border countless times since the start of Russia’s war of aggression.



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And what I see on the other side is the brutal reality of war and the suffering of the innocent people.

No one wants more peace than the Ukrainian people.

They are fighting for their soil and for our security.

We can never match their sacrifice
but what we have done is stand by their side.

And Ukraine can rely on us.

And dear, Boyko,
I want to thank you,
our friends from GERB
and the Bulgarian people,

that you have wholeheartedly supported
and you continue to support Ukraine.

The military equipment
which you provide

can be immediately used by the Ukrainians on the battlefield against the Russian aggressor.

That is enormously important for Ukraine's resistance.

But also for our European security

And Europe is grateful for that.

But security for Europe also means doing more together on our own defence.

Our goal should be clear:

Europe must spend more on defence, spend better



and spend European.

We need a strong European defence industry.

And I know that Bulgaria can substantially contribute to that.

Europe has to be able to defend itself and to protect its citizens.

This is why we need a true European defence Union.

This is why I will designate a Defence Commissioner for the next mandate!

It was also together,
That we delivered the Pact on Migration and Asylum.

With this pact,
we are further Europe's external borders.

We are ensuring faster and simpler procedures.

But that alone is not enough.

Smugglers and traffickers are making billions.

They lie to people,
they rob them and they put them on unseaworthy rubber boats.

It is high time we took tougher action against this organised crime.
To put it bluntly:

We have fulfilled our international obligations in the past,
we do it today
and we will do it in the future.

But it is us, Europeans, who decide who comes to Europe
and under what circumstances.

And not the smugglers and traffickers!

Finally,
We need to strengthen together our European competitiveness.

We have to make business easier.

That means less bureaucracy and simpler and faster procedures.

We need to give companies the freedom to innovate and create good jobs.

This is why
I want to reduce 25% of the bureaucracy companies.

We need simpler and faster procedures
To speed up and to make life easier for our companies.

But this is also true for the farmers and rural areas.

As we can see in the Thracian valley or here around Plovdiv.

Bulgaria's sweet cherries or the fruity pink tomatoes are famous all over Europe.

I have spoken to many farmers during my campaign.

I know about the challenges they face.

I want be very clear –
We will continue to support our farmers.

They work hard for the quality food we eat.

I have initiated a strategic dialogue with our European farmers.

It is together and by listening to each other that we want to reach our goals.

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And EPP will always be by the side of our farmers!

Dear friends,
It is now 17 years since Bulgaria joined the European Union.

And we all see every day what a success story that is.

For 6.5 million Bulgarians.

But also for 450 million Europeans.

Every day.

A success we achieved together.

And we want to write together
the next chapter in this success story.

We want to complete our Union!

That's why I would like to thank you, dear Boyko,

for putting the Balkan countries

at the top of the political agenda.

during the Bulgarian Presidency.

Today not only the Balkan countries, but also Ukraine and Moldova are part of that story.

Since we all know:

A larger Europe is a stronger Europe.

And, dear friends,



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I want to assure you,

Bulgaria's voice is being heard in Brussels!

And in Brussel, we listen to you.

Dear Boyko, dear friends, 7 days till election starts!

We have to get the votes out!

Let's stand up for prosperity,

Let's stand up for security

Let's stand up for democracy.

And above all, my friends let's stand up for Europe.

Merci!! Long live Europe!

