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## EUROPE MUST MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE FOR CLIMATE | VIEW

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An alliance of authoritarian, nationalist political parties is projected to gain more than 70 seats in the upcoming crucial elections for the European parliament taking place between May 23 and 26. This rising alliance talks of sovereignty and freedom, but it aims to undermine the very institutions Europe has built since the 1950s and could end the peace project built in the wake of the Second World War.

The parties that dream of a Europe made up of self centred, authoritarian states, are the same parties that oppose climate action and question the very existence of the climate crisis.

At the same time, striking youth all over the continent are calling out Europe's elites blatant failure to govern responsibly. There is no time to waste to drastically reduce emissions if we are to prevent more climate chaos disproportionately affecting today's youth and those already most disadvantaged. Voters overwhelmingly agree with the youth demonstrators that urgent climate action is needed now. Almost four-fifths of European voters say that climate policy is a key concern for them as they decide who to vote for. The impacts of global warming - such as heat waves, droughts and other extreme weather events - are being felt as a daily reality by more and more Europeans and are also starting to have an impact on their political choices.

For decades, the EU could claim to be a progressive leader on the environment - at least compared to the rest of the world - by, among other things, regulating chemical pollutants, banning the dumping of hazardous waste or restricting genetically modified organisms. Now, it is far too often on the wrong course. Its climate targets are incompatible with a safe climate future and the EU is choosing to appease Donald Trump over trade rather than standing up for climate action, for example.

Amongst the absurdities of the drawn-out Brexit discussions it's easy to forget that what Europe does reverberates across the world. But the EU is both the largest economy in the world and the world's largest trading block. The rules Europe adopts - including on climate change - send signals to the rest of the world and directly impacts multinationals wanting to sell to 500 million people living in the EU.

If Europe started to build a trading system that took climate change seriously, the rest of the world would have to listen. If Europe raised its climate targets and actions to deliver on the Paris Agreement - as Greta Thunberg recently demanded during a visit to the European Parliament - it would matter. If it chose to lead the way, the EU could, for example, turn the upcoming UN Climate Summit in September into what UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres demands: an action

summit that delivers decisive plans instead of just even more fine words.

But things could get much worse if climate-crisis denying, authoritarian players play a significant role in Europe's parliament in the next 5 years.

Europe therefore faces a stark choice in May's election. The continent can choose xenophobia and division, which would jeopardize desperately needed climate action, as well as the European peace project. Or Europe can choose to rise to the challenge of the school strikers, regain legitimacy with its people and make the biggest economy on our planet a global leader on issues that impact all of our lives, like climate change.

Either way, what Europe does in the next 5 years is of truly global significance and the world should be paying more attention to the European elections. All of our futures depend on the future Europeans choose.

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