To: Mr. Charles Michel,  
President of the European Council

Brussels, 8 April 2024  
Re: Strategic Agenda

Dear Mr. President,

In a world faced with conflict, growing inequality and the climate crisis, it is necessary more than ever that the European Union’s policies contribute to a just and sustainable world. However, in recent years, the EU and its Member States have turned inward, responding to short-sighted political agendas rather than supporting human rights and sustainable development.

Despite promises to comply with international law, EU principles and values, and to protect fundamental rights, we have seen the EU strike dysfunctional and non-transparent migration deals with neighbouring countries to outsource its responsibilities, diverting scarce development funds to pay the bill. At a time of multiple interlinking global crises, the EU needs to ensure that aid is used to end poverty in the Global South and to boost partner countries’ economies - not to end migration and boost borders.

Your Excellency, the climate crisis is the greatest threat to humanity and to the planet. With our energy production and consumption models, Europe is carrying a historic responsibility. Instead of backsliding on climate commitments for short-term political gains, Europe must lead by example and ramp up climate action by committing to achieving climate neutrality by 2040. Simultaneously, the EU must provide new and additional climate finance to support low-income countries in adapting to the unstoppable effects of a climate crisis they did not create, and to compensate them for loss and damage. European leaders must also ensure that the EU’s trade and industrial policies support climate and development objectives.

Negotiations for the next EU multi-financial framework will begin soon after the European elections. This is a critical moment for the EU’s leadership. The EU needs to bolster its humanitarian and development budget to ensure it is fit for purpose, including by increasing annual ODA and meeting the 0.7% GNI goal. This also means prioritizing human rights, sustainable development, and the fight against inequality in all foreign policies and budgets, rather than expecting miracles from the private sector to do ‘less with more’. Specifically, the humanitarian budget needs to meet ever growing needs, and humanitarian work needs to be embedded into sustainable and long-term resilience programming that aims for structural change.

As current resources for development aid, humanitarian needs and climate challenges are not sufficient, additional revenues must be collected where excessive fortune has accumulated: by taxing the wealthiest and most profitable companies and polluters. Progressive taxation in the EU will raise the necessary revenues while reducing inequalities. Oxfam has estimated that a progressive wealth tax of up to 5% on the EU’s multi-millionaires and billionaires could collect 286.5 billion euros annually.

Mr. President, within a multipolar world, the EU has a special role to play. Do we use the next five years to address global challenges together with communities and partner countries in the Global South, or do we build a Union on disrespect for international law, climate backsliding and inequality? The time to choose is now.

Yours sincerely,

Amitabh Behar  
Executive Director  
Oxfam International  
c/o Oxfam EU Advocacy Office