



**European Commission - Speech**  
**[Check Against Delivery]**



**Speech by President von der Leyen at the Opening Session of the Conference "Reconstructing the Future for People and Planet – a New European Bauhaus Initiative", organised by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences**

Rome, 9 June 2022

Dear Dr. von Braun,  
Your Eminence, Cardinal Turkson,  
Lieber John Schnellhuber,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am so glad to be here today. At the Pontifical Academy of Sciences where a commitment to science and progress meets a devotion to values.

It is a real honour that you put the New European Bauhaus at the centre of your conference. It shows how impactful the initiative already is: not just in finding inspiring solutions to climate change, but also in helping to improve people's lives in the way we design and build our homes and cities. This is how change happens in democratic societies: from the bottom up, where everyone can be a part of the solution.

Like the Pontifical Academy, the New European Bauhaus is guided by values. And it is three principles in particular that I would like to speak about today.

The first principle is sustainability. People of faith believe that Creation was entrusted to us, human beings, but does not belong to us. Our responsibility is to preserve it, to take care of it, and pass it on to future generations. But for too long, humanity has forgotten this responsibility. Generation after generation has exploited nature beyond our planet's boundaries. We took, we polluted, we disposed. And this has to stop. We need a new model, which gives back to nature instead of taking away from it. This is the European Green Deal. We want to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. We have put this ambition into binding law.

As a highly innovative and industrialised region, Europe can show that it can be done: Create a circular economy that intrinsically values nature and human health. That there is no trade-off between economic growth and cutting carbon emissions. And that our societies can flourish, without putting future generations at risk. Professor Schnellhuber spoke about the importance of the construction sector in the green transition. Buildings are responsible for nearly 40% of Europe's carbon emissions. This is more than the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of the entire Japanese economy. That is why one of the first strategies we put forward as part of the European Green Deal was a renovation wave. It is backed with 53 billion euros from our recovery plan, NextGenerationEU.

The New European Bauhaus works like an incubator for this plan. We need to bring nature back into our cities. Take our new European research centre in the southern Spanish city of Sevilla. Just recently, the European Commission gave the go-ahead for this new building. It will house over 400 international scientists. The building will not just be fully carbon neutral, but energy positive. This means that the extra renewable electricity it generates can be stored and even shared back into the grid. A building that gives back more than it takes. This is the power of green innovation.

But the New European Bauhaus goes further. We believe that everything we make, everything we build should not just strive for functionality, but also for beauty. This brings me to the second principle of the New European Bauhaus:

Humans need beauty to thrive. And here I'm not just talking about aesthetics. I'm also talking about another kind of beauty: the quality of life. There is a project in Luxembourg that recently won a Bauhaus prize: A new building for a day-care centre and primary school. It was constructed almost entirely from wood. Other natural elements were also used, like straw, clay and wool – all sourced locally. As you know, sustainably harvested timber can reduce a building's carbon emissions by up to 60%. Pope Francis is so right when he says that humans are not meant to be inundated by cement and steel. Building more with natural elements, like wood, is both good for the planet, and good for

the wellbeing of people.

The Bauhaus principle of sustainability and beauty translates well to other sectors of our economy. Like the fashion industry. The New European Bauhaus is working with the creative industry. This sector employs over 2 million people in Europe. The goal of this cooperation is to promote nature-based materials, the reduction of waste and the use of chemicals in the production process. There is a growing market for this worldwide. Citizens around the world want affordable products that are sustainable and beautiful. European high-end cultural and creative brands account for over 70% of the world's market. This is just another example how the New European Bauhaus can promote and accelerate the green transition. For the success of the European Green Deal, it is so important that people embrace it as their own project. Because such a fundamental change requires more than just money and laws. It requires millions of ideas and the enthusiasm of citizens, businesses and scientists alike.

This brings me to my third and final point. The European Green Deal will only succeed with the participation of all. And the New European Bauhaus offers a wonderful framework for this. We started the initiative with a co-creation period. Hundreds of discussions and events took place. Hundreds of experts, but also thousands of citizens contributed with their ideas. Participation is key for our success. And we see already that it works:

Almost two years later it is hard to count all the grassroots and citizens' initiatives around the New European Bauhaus. And sometimes we are even surprised to learn about new initiatives. One that is currently developing New European Bauhaus concepts for schools – to make the buildings more sustainable, but also better for the pupils and teachers. In the Czech Republic citizens and architects are working on a concept how to transform their whole city into a better place to live. The New European Bauhaus Prize that we will award this Saturday is a great mirror of this movement: We received several thousands of applications from all over the European Union – from Cyprus to Finland, from the Netherlands to the East of Poland. The best projects will be rewarded – but all are great examples of what is possible.

To support all those who are leading the green transition on the ground, we recently launched the New European Bauhaus Lab. It's a co-creation space for projects that improve our daily lives. And Bauhauses are spreading: A Bauhaus of the Mountains led by North-Italian region South-Tyrol a Nordic Bauhaus around circularity and low-carbon architecture and a Bauhaus of the Danube region bringing together all countries that are located along the wonderful river. In addition, with all the partners – over 450 organisations in the meantime – the Lab is working on a labelling strategy to define what makes buildings or products “New European Bauhaus-like”. This kind of policy-making is bottom up, co-creative and solutions-driven. The green transition is more sustainable the more ownership people have in it.

Later today, we'll be kicking-off the first-ever New European Bauhaus Festival. Where everyone who is already engaged in the initiative, or wants to contribute, can meet and share. More than 200 local events will take place all over Europe. Over 100 projects will be showcased in Brussels – and that's only a small selection of all those who had applied.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The New European Bauhaus is designed by everyone, for everyone. It is truly a shared vision. We need to bring together all people of good will. People who want a healthier planet, who want a better quality of life, who want to be part of the solution.

As Pope Francis wrote in the Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si'*:

“Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home. It is time to bring the whole human family together. For we know that things can change.”

SPEECH/22/3563

Press contacts:

[Dana SPINANT](#) (+32 2 299 01 50)

[Adalbert JAHNZ](#) (+ 32 2 295 31 56)

General public inquiries: [Europe Direct](#) by phone [00 800 67 89 10 11](#) or by [email](#)