

9 MAI 2022 - SEUL LE PRONONCÉ FAIT FOI

ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC AT THE CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

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I have some bad news, I'm going to give a speech. But I also have some good news. I am going to try not to repeat what has already been said so well here today before me.

Madam President of the European Parliament, dear Roberta,
Madam President of the European Commission, dear Ursula,
Prime Minister of Portugal, dear António,
Co-chairs,
Ministers, members of the European Parliament and national parliaments,
European citizens,

“World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it.” These words spoken by Robert Schuman on 9 May 1950 on the contribution which a living Europe can bring to civilization are more crucial than ever. These creative efforts are fitting for the times we are living in and are today undoubtedly more necessary than in the past. They are fitting during these times in which war has returned to our continent - as you have all so accurately said -, at a time in which a European people, the Ukrainian people, is fighting for freedom. They are fitting at a time in which you, European citizens, Members of Parliament, Ministers, Commissioners, political leaders and citizens with real experience, as you said earlier, have completed a democratic exercise which has never before been seen in our history or in the history of the world. You are the representatives of this living, creative, democratic Europe, this Europe of action, and it is up to us to be its artisans, here in Strasbourg, in this European capital which we hold so dear.

The sovereign choice of the French people has brought me before you today to tell you that it is a historic task that France will not shy away from, but will work even harder to accomplish, because France has once again clearly and resolutely chosen Europe in entrusting me with another term of office to work with all of you to build a stronger and more sovereign Europe.

Together we decided a year ago that this Europe we are celebrating today would enter a new stage. It was with President David Sassoli, and our thoughts are with him today as you have all said so well, and it was under the Portuguese Presidency, António. I would like to commend the Presidency and the elegance of the Portuguese Prime Minister, who is with us today, for consistently staying loyal to this commitment.

Launched a year ago, in circumstances that were a bit different, as we all remember, here in Strasbourg, in this capital of European fraternity which has been regained, in this Parliament which houses what is most dear to us: our European democracy. This new phase is marked by an unprecedented democratic exercise, which does not consist in presenting our citizens with perhaps overly simple alternatives, for and against, but fully involving them in discussions on the future of our Europe. What you have done, and what has never been seen before, is to be fully involved in the design, at a challenging time in our history, and to create through collective deliberation, intelligent debate, exchanges of ideas, and solutions, some of which could be applied immediately, others which need to be developed, but all working towards building this Europe of today and tomorrow.

Today, on this 9 May, freedom and hope in the future are the face of the European Union. It is in the name of this freedom and this hope that we support and that we will continue to support Ukraine, its President, Volodymyr Zelensky, and all the Ukrainian people. What is our aim in the face of Russia's

unilateral decision to invade Ukraine and to attack its people? End this war as swiftly as possible. Do everything in our power so that Ukraine can hold out to the end and that Russia can never triumph. Safeguard peace on the rest of the European continent and avoid any escalation.

To end this war, we have imposed unprecedented sanctions in order to block over the long term the sources of funding of the war in Russia. To support Ukraine, we have mobilized like never before huge amounts of military, financial and humanitarian resources. We need to focus our efforts on establishing an effective response regarding food security, and we will continue to do so. So that justice prevails, we are fighting and will continue to fight against the impunity of unspeakable crimes committed by Russia in Ukraine.

However, we are not at war with Russia. We are working as Europeans to preserve the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine so that peace returns to our continent. It is up to Ukraine alone to define the conditions for negotiations with Russia. But our duty is to stand with Ukraine to achieve the ceasefire, then build peace. We will then be there to rebuild Ukraine as Europeans, always.

Because in the end, when peace returns to European soil, we will need to build new security balances and we will need, together, to never give in to the temptation of humiliation, nor the spirit of revenge, because these have already in the past wreaked enough havoc on the roads to peace.

It is also in the name of this freedom and this hope that we have introduced this citizen-based inspiration you provide, this unprecedented breath of democracy. You have explained it so well, with your words, your generations, your work obliges us, and today, does not indicate a full stop, but a semi colon, the end of a stage of your work and the beginning of our responsibility.

The President of the European Commission has just clearly committed to review and attentively follow up on each of your proposals. I wish to take the opportunity to thank her for that here today. We will have a concrete date in September, as you have just heard. On behalf of my country holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union and as President of the French Republic, I would like to make sure that this exercise is not just an exercise of style or merely an example of a method, but that it truly results in practical work, powerful and tangible developments and that the citizens of Europe can reap their benefits.

For this conference should not stop there. My deep conviction, during the times we are living in and the war we are experiencing, and which your work has confirmed, is above all that the crises must not distract us from our agenda. Many of your proposals do not require institutional reform, but remind us of the necessity of our own agenda. The protection of the climate and biodiversity, health and the quality of our food. A fairer, more inclusive Europe. A Europe focused on gender equality. A Europe which disposes of the means to defend itself, a Europe focused on solidarity, a Europe focused on defending our values and the rule of law. Everywhere, through your proposals, many very tangible things are included. It will be up to us, in the coming Council meetings and in the Commission's agenda, to draw all the relevant conclusions. I commit here today to doing so.

Your work focuses on two requirements that I would like to come back to: independence and effectiveness, without which there is no legitimacy in our democracies. These two imperatives are also lessons that we can learn collectively from the crises we have just gone through and that we are experiencing: independence and effectiveness. More European independence and sovereignty are what we need.

While overcoming the crisis of meaning that it experienced for so many decades, our Europe has rallied in recent years. Through your proposals, we see the main thread of a strategic agenda that together with the Presidents and the Portuguese Prime Minister, we have crafted, an agenda of strategic independence, this Versailles Agenda. The financial crisis ten years ago, the pandemic, and the war have shown us our vulnerabilities and the danger of worsening their consequences if we do not

respond quickly and firmly enough to dependencies.

The project for a Europe which is the master of its own destiny, free to make its own choices, a powerful Europe which is open to the world but a world in which we can choose our partners and not depend on them, is at the core of our agenda. Remaining open without being dependent is a condition for pursuing the European project and for our democracies. You have drawn up some areas to focus on. They also correspond to what we will work on in the coming weeks and months.

When it comes to defence, to invest more, identify the capabilities to be developed and to do so, build up European industrial sectors, prepare ourselves for new forms of conflict, whether they be spatial, cyber or maritime, and better protect the countries, represented here today, located at the European Union border. In the face of this new risk, a new threat that has transformed itself in recent weeks, this is our duty. And everything we defend would become irrelevant if we cannot, in the coming weeks and months, make credible our capacity as Europeans to defend ourselves, and particularly our eastern flank, through our cooperation, our allies and our alliances.

When it comes to the protection of the environment, you have also so accurately written that we must stop using fossil fuels as swiftly as possible, and the war is making this even more critical. This means achieving what is on our climate agenda, being more sovereign and making Russia face up to its responsibilities. The war in Ukraine and our wish to end our dependence on Russia's fossil fuels means that we must be even more ambitious when it comes to climate issues. We must invest more in renewable energies and in nuclear energy. We must choose the road of energy sobriety and continue to protect and support Europeans in the face of rising prices. Acting as Europeans to make our continent an ecological power which achieves carbon neutrality.

We must also regain our independence in food production. The war in Ukraine is hugely disrupting supply chains and global markets. We must reassess our production strategies to first defend our food sovereignty and protein sovereignty as Europeans. But also to be able to define and reassess a strategy towards the rest of the world. If we want to avoid famine, geopolitical disruption at our borders and tragedies in the Mediterranean basin, we must shoulder our European responsibility.

Finally, democratic independence and freedom of information. You rightly place great emphasis on this issue in your proposals. You have started to demonstrate what we truly are: a civic and democratic power. And there is simply no equivalent anywhere in the world, none. We must continue to foster this civic power by defending the freedom and integrity of information exchanged in our territory, defending the integrity of our democratic processes, and defending democracy and the rule of law everywhere in our territory. That is what we are reliving through the heroic struggle of our Ukrainian brothers. Democracy is fragile, the rule of law is precarious. Let us together reinvigorate them with new commitments. Our independence and sovereignty are the prerequisites for our freedom.

And the second major path which I want to stress is that of effectiveness. Yes. It is critical to respond quickly, strongly and clearly to crises, and to do it as a democracy. Think back two years ago, even a year ago, what were we hearing? Much of our public opinion believed that it would be much better to be an authoritarian power in order to tackle the pandemic. That it was much better not to have a democratic system. That Russian and Chinese vaccines would be our saviours. And what did we prove? That free and open science, that the democratic, transparent, deliberative and demanding processes in our national parliaments and at European level, that Europe becoming a health powerhouse – and I would like to commend the tremendous commitment and work of the Commission because there was no treaty on the issue or no text to define it – together, we provided an unprecedented scientific, democratic and effective response to this pandemic. By successfully producing a vaccine on our soil, by becoming the world's first area of vaccine production, by choosing never to shut our borders, by always leaving our borders open and exporting and being the world leader in vaccine solidarity. That is the Europe of which we must be proud: a Europe of democracy, free and open science and effectiveness. They all go hand-in-hand. And this is the choice which we must

continue to defend.

Looking back over the past 15 years, in the face of the economic and financial crisis, we reacted too slowly. Portugal and many other countries like Greece were extremely hard hit. First we were divided, we withdrew into our national egotism, we pointed fingers, we did not work together and we effectively told our citizens to adapt to a reality and financial crisis which, we must remember, began across the Atlantic. We must be humble and admit that the response only came from the European Central Bank and Mario Draghi's famous expression "whatever it takes". But in the face of the pandemic and today in the face of the war, we proved the opposite. In the face of the pandemic, the response which I mentioned, but also the unique decision in July 2020 to create a new budget, mutualised financing, a new ambition for a new Europe, by together raising money on the markets to invest in our priorities as Europeans. And in the face of the war, we decided for the first time to mobilize the European Peace Facility to help Ukraine to defend itself and fight, something we had never done before. We must be proud of these choices of efficiency, without which we would not be here today discussing together like this. And so, for this effectiveness [applause], you can applaud our Europe, which all of you represent.

Your challenge for us is to be just as effective in times of peace, when there are no crises. And being effective means making quick, collective decisions, investing heavily in the right places and leaving no one behind – that's what it means to be European.

To do so, it is clear that we will also have to reform our texts. And so I want to state clearly here today that one of the paths towards this reform is to form a Convention to revise our treaties. This is a proposal from the European Parliament which I support. I am in favour of it. It means that we must now work hard, on the basis of your proposals and work, to very clearly set out our goals because before we begin a Convention, we must know its overall purpose. We know from experience in undertaking such ambitious projects that if the objective is not clear from the outset, it is unlikely to be any clearer at the end. You have given us a very strong framework. The debates and policies discussed by the Heads of State and Government show it as well. And so we must set out the prerequisites in the weeks ahead. And also build consensus from everyone. And as I said, I support this institutional reform. And I would like us to discuss it with plain latitude and audacity, starting at the European Council in June.

This will mean moving forward to achieve greater simplicity. We know the path ahead, we must progress while continuing to generalise the use of qualified majority voting across the board in our key public policy decisions. We must also continue to make progress and set out how we can show more solidarity, clarify our objectives and the objectives of all our institutions by setting objectives enabling us to keep our Europe united: growth, full employment, our climate goals. In areas where the rules of so many of our European institutions were drawn up decades ago, and were based on objectives which have now certainly become incomplete and will not allow us to face our crises and the historical challenge of our unity. Full employment, growth, carbon neutrality and social justice must be our institutions' core objectives.

Finally, as you clearly mentioned in your work, to reform and begin this project also requires legitimacy and democratic control, deepening this unprecedented democratic adventure and thus continuing democratic innovations, as we have been able to do through your work. I would like to thank Madam President for setting the ball rolling with her clear commitment just now. But we know that we must go further. Our election rules, our rules for appointing our representatives, our control regulations, our right of initiative at the European Parliament – all that must be at the heart of this upcoming Convention. I firmly believe that we can begin this work, and I believe effectiveness is the main priority, but why? Because I believe that if we can all meet these economic, social and environmental objectives, we can act effectively, and above all keep our Europe united. Because without these objectives, we will not succeed to convince our peoples anymore that the European adventure unites

them, protects them, and enables them to move forward.

During this challenge, we know that we may not always agree. And we must not fear differentiation, or avant-gardes, they have always been fruitful for the European project. And they have never excluded but have rather brought forward, and they already exist, from the euro to Schengen. But in recent years I have been struck by how our desire to stick to 27 almost prevents us from being more ambitious.

I am struck, and I admit this to be a partial failure, that we Heads of State and Government never manage to meet in eurozone format. We are the only joint property managers who don't meet among themselves alone, as property managers. We always have to invite the rest of the entire street. We are afraid to admit that we have greater ambitions, and from the euro to Schengen, it is always the same thing. And that is a mistake because these avant-garde circles do not exclude others, but rather allow those who want to progress a little further to bring the others along and to make the ambition desirable, instead of playing a more risky waiting game.

I know there are concerns about a "multi-speed Europe" – which actually already exists – but speeding up the pace, meeting our ambitions, creating convergence at its core, without a predefined format, and never excluding, but also never allowing the more sceptical or hesitant among us to slow down this pace, is what will enable our Europe to assert itself as a power. This differentiation open to all is true to our history and the ambitions held by the founders, by Jacques Delors, and for our Europe. And it is a prerequisite of this effectiveness and ambition that I spoke about.

Finally, to conclude, I will take a step back from your proposals to come back to the context; I know my words would be insufficient if I did not address this particular point. The war in Ukraine and the legitimate aspiration of its people, just like that of Moldova and Georgia, to join the European Union, encourages us to rethink our geography and the organization of our continent. And I want to do that with the same sincerity and the same high standards with which you carried out your work, and with which I am speaking today before you.

We feel in our heart that Ukraine, through its fight and its courage, is already today a member of our Europe, of our family and of our union.

But even if we were to grant it tomorrow the status of candidate – the process is underway and I hope that we can move quickly – for accession to our European Union, we all know perfectly well that the process which would allow them to join, would in reality take several years, and most likely several decades. That is the truth, unless we decide to lower the standards of this accession and therefore completely rethink the unity of our Europe and even the principles in the name of which we hold some of our own members to a high standard, and to which we are all dedicated.

Let's be clear: the European Union, considering its level of integration and ambition, cannot, in the short term, be the only way to structure the European continent. Already, several Western Balkan countries have begun the accession process. And this will continue, and they have a path ahead which has already been paved.

Faced with this new geopolitical context, we very clearly need to find a way to think about our Europe, its unity, and its stability, without weakening the closeness built inside our European Union. We therefore have the historic duty, not to do what we have always done and say the only solution is accession, I am saying this in all sincerity, but rather to open up a historic reflection commensurate with the events we are experiencing, on the organization of our continent. At a time when the Council of Europe itself, this family of shared values abandoned by Russia, this Council which is right here in Strasbourg, is also being shaken by a history that repeats itself.

In 1989, President François Mitterrand opened up this reflection when the Soviet Union collapsed, proposing the creation of a European confederation. His proposal did not bear fruit. It was most

certainly ahead of its time. It included Russia in this confederation, which, of course, was swiftly deemed unacceptable for the States that had just freed themselves from the yoke of the Soviet Union. But it raised the right question and this question remains: how can we organize Europe from a political perspective and with a broader scope than that of the European Union? It is our historic obligation to respond to that question today and create what I would describe here before you as “a European political community”.

This new European organization would allow democratic European nations that subscribe to our shared core values to find a new space for political and security cooperation, cooperation in the energy sector, in transport, investments, infrastructures, the free movement of persons and in particular of our youth. Joining it would not prejudge future accession to the European Union necessarily, and it would not be closed to those who have left the EU.

It would bring our Europe together, respecting its true geography, on the basis of its democratic values, with the desire to preserve the unity of our continent and by preserving the strength and ambition of our integration.

This is the proposal, in addition to the response to your own, that I wanted to make here before you today. In the coming weeks and months, I will strive to consult and work with all States and governments interested in this project to develop and complete it, because I think the stability and future of our continent depends on it.

Ladies and gentlemen, a year ago, I expressed my hope that this conference would herald the return of great dreams and ambitions. That is what you wanted, too. And that is what you did. And so, that is what we shall pursue together. That’s what Europe is. It is fantastic dreams and unprecedented ambitions. And it is the collective capacity to build compromises that may sometimes seem laborious, but which are the language of Europe; that is, the language of constant translation.

Act decisively. Move swiftly. Dream big. These words are not only the prerogative of China or the United States of America. We are making these ambitions our own. Let us keep in mind that Europe would be nothing without this extra touch of European spirit that makes us unique, sets the course, gives meaning, and makes our Europe this singular continent where great celebrations are held while speaking all of our languages and while translating them through our universal language, through music, and our European anthems.

So this path that we have begun to map out here and now in Strasbourg requires a pledge. This Strasbourg pledge for a sovereign, united, democratic and ambitious Europe. It is up to us to remain true to it, all of us together.

You can count on me. Thank you very much.