

7 November 2024 - **Seul le prononcé fait foi**

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Speech by the President of the Republic at the European Political Community Summit.

(Check against delivery)

(...)

We all have different sensitivities, but we certainly have common interests. (...) The question is, do we want to write a joint chapter about Greater Europe in the 21st century? I believe in that very strongly. And so I think it's here that strategic geopolitical unity must be written. And the time we're living through is the right one. (...)

The question is, are we prepared to defend the interest of Europeans? That's the only question we have to answer. And I personally think that's our priority. And we shouldn't do this in a naïve form of transatlanticism, nor by questioning our alliances, nor in a narrow-minded spirit of nationalism that would prevent us from taking up the challenge posed by China and the United States. And so this is a decisive moment in history for us as Europeans.

Basically, the question we have to answer is: do we want to read the history that is written by others – the wars launched by Vladimir Putin, the US elections, the technological and trade choices made by the Chinese – or do we want to write history? I personally believe we have the strength to write it. Our economies are strong, our countries have sophisticated defence systems, and we stand for something.

The European Union has 449 million inhabitants in its 27 countries, and the European Political Community has over 742 million inhabitants. If we decide to become aware of what we represent geopolitically and commercially, this makes us incredibly powerful. There's no market with 742 million inhabitants as united by history, interests and values as we are around this table, no other, if we wake up and decide deep down not to disappear geopolitically and not to be an adjustment market for other powers, economically and commercially.

And so, for me, this is the moment for us to decide to take action, to defend our national and European interests at the same time, to believe in our sovereignty and strategic autonomy, and basically to say that we don't just want to be customers, to be a market that's already taken, to actually delegate our economy, our technological choices and our security to others, but that we want to take full ownership of the issues of peace on our soil, of our prosperity and our democratic model."

For me, these are the three challenges facing the European Political Community that we need to discuss together. Peace, as Volodymyr has just said, means helping Ukraine resist the Russian war of aggression. There may be different sensitivities around this table. But I strongly believe that our interests are the same. Our interest is for Russia not to win this war – again, whatever anyone here or the peoples think – because if it wins, that means we're saying to an imperial power on our borders: "you can be expansionist". I don't see who around this table can stay calm if we allow that. (...)

Beyond that, our Defence Europe needs to be built, and Europe needs to be turned into a security space. Now, the European Union has done a huge amount of work in recent years; we still have a lot to do to finance, to build it. NATO obviously has a key role as a pillar, and within NATO we Europeans want to play our role. There's nothing in this European pillar of NATO to detract from the Alliance, but the fact is there's been a strategic awakening we Europeans must take on board; we mustn't delegate our security to the Americans forever. And I think it's also important to send the message that we're now suppliers of security solutions. (...)

A few years ago, we built the European Intervention Initiative. There are a dozen States around the table that are part of it. It's completely intergovernmental. And I'd like to invite all those colleagues who are ready, and all those who aren't EU members, to join it. Let's broaden the European Intervention Initiative to cover the whole European Political Community, to build solutions for common intervention in theatres of operation. That's what enabled us to create [Operation] Agénor, what allowed us to intervene in the Sahel, and let's try and move forward.

I also think we have the opportunity here to build very concrete solutions to combat illegal immigration rings. We've built some very robust solutions as Europeans, like the Pact on Migration and Asylum. There are some very robust solutions being created with countries of transit or origin to prevent migration and to help with returns, but cooperation within the European Political Community on migration issues is extra effective because we're covering all the migration routes. And when Keir Starmer faces this very migration problem with small boats, it's not just a Franco-British bilateral problem, it's a problem that affects the whole of Europe and begins with either the southern routes or the eastern routes. In fact, all of us here are capable of contributing a solution to this. (...)

At the same time, I'm convinced that we've also got to clarify our agenda, i.e. be bold enough to have a common economic security agenda. We must do as Europeans what we did when world trade was distorted by over-subsidizing from certain third countries. We've got to stop looking like a supermarket open to all and sundry. If we believe in our geopolitical future, we must say that these 700 million inhabitants and consumers – the members of Greater Europe – have common interests, they want to be open, they want there to be foreign direct investment from everywhere. But in their trade they want to be respected much more, be united and defend their interests.

Finally, democracy; I think what we've just experienced these past few weeks shows that the European democratic model is itself also open to attack. In Georgia and Moldova, there were several attacks – cyber attacks, vote buying, manipulation. All the observers demonstrated this. I want here to congratulate Maia Sandu on her re-election, and we'll have the opportunity to do so later, and I very much hope – I say this to the Prime Minister, who is with us – that Georgia will confirm its choice for Europe and also for a democratic model. But let's be clear-sighted, our model of liberal, open democracy is prone to attack by other powers that don't have the same agenda, that want to divide us. The Baltic States, which are here, also know how much they're attacked daily by cyber attacks and information manipulation. We must adopt an agenda to protect our democracies, our democratic rules, the forge of public opinion, the way our fellow citizens form their opinions in order to vote freely. Because if we become a stage for foreign propaganda due to the fact we're naïve and it's merely thought that democracy is about providing infrastructures but not about dealing with content regulation, liberal democracies will be swept away. And as you can see, basically, whether this is about our security and defence, our economy and model of prosperity or our democracy, we have to build an extremely ambitious positive agenda if we become aware of what the Greater Europe around the table is: an unparalleled geopolitical power.

Quite simply, up to now we haven't come to terms with our role as a fully independent power. We think we've got to delegate our geopolitics to the United States of America, that we've got to delegate our growth model to our Chinese customers, that we've got to delegate our technological innovation to the Americans. That isn't the greatest idea. I think we can take back control if we decide, as regards the coming decade, to build, not just within the European Union, but here. Basically, for me it's simple: the world is made up of herbivores and carnivores. If we decide to remain herbivores, the carnivores will win and we'll become a market for them. I think at the very least it would be good to choose to be omnivores. I don't want to be aggressive, I just want us to know how to defend ourselves on each of these issues. But I don't want to see Europe left as a great stage filled with herbivores to be devoured by carnivores, according to their agenda. We must accept this. This is why I'm a great believer in this format.

I thank the Prime Minister for welcoming us and today, the day after the American election, I think we owe it to ourselves to be clear-sighted, ambitious and determined about our agenda. It's credible, it's totally feasible, it's a question of common will and the ability to be aware of who we are. Thank you very much, Viktor.