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European Parliament

I am very pleased and honoured to answer your invitation, Mr President, to come and, as you said a few moments ago, freely discuss the situation of our Europe in a very specific context.

The discussion element is of particular importance because I made speeches, several months ago now, particularly at the Sorbonne, and I think that discussion is now what we need the most in this place where every day you bring to life our Europe with its various sensibilities, divergences and convergences, by building the indispensable compromises which drive it forward.

Our discussion will take place in a context which can only increase our responsibility. A context which is first and foremost one of divisions and sometimes of doubt within Europe. A context where Brexit continues to be debated and worked on – I would like to take the opportunity to commend the work carried out by Michel Barnier over the last few months – but that is also a context where doubt has been seeded in several European countries and which, month after month, has brought out sensibilities which call into question things which we used to see as fundamentals.

A context where a sort of European civil war is reappearing, where our differences, sometimes our national egoisms, appear more important than what unites us within a global context. A context where fascination with illiberalism – and this is something I would like to come back to later – is growing by the day. A context where geopolitical threats – and we will definitely come back to this during our discussion – give Europe a responsibility which grows day by day. A context of large-scale international conflict, from the Levant to the Sahel, but also the emergence of major authoritarian powers and a clear strategy to challenge the framework of multilateralism where Europe played a full role and which was also the framework not only for European influence but also for the construction of European peace.

Our discussion also takes place at a time of great transformations brought about by digital technology, climate change and its consequences, which put a question mark over the fundamentals of the industrial society which was the basis for our major compromises, foster fears which lead to the reassessment of certain major balances and force us to rethink the rules for our collective action.

This time therefore gives us a very special responsibility. We cannot pretend that our discussions are in some way ordinary. This is the time leading up to the forthcoming European elections, where we must fight for the ideals which constructed us. To start our discussion, I would simply like to share two strong convictions with you.

The first is that deciding to abandon our commitment to democracy, and all that goes with it in Europe, is the wrong path to take. The second is that, within this framework, we can, and must, build a new European sovereignty by the means of which we will provide a clear and firm response to our fellow citizens that, yes, we can protect them and provide a response to this global disorder.

I firmly believe that European democracy is our best chance in this world at this difficult time. Abandoning our model, and I would go as far as to say our identity, would be the worst mistake. Here in Strasbourg, as in Brussels, you bring democracy in Europe to life, as Tocqueville spoke about. Our identity is first and foremost a democracy which respects the individual, minority, fundamental rights, which go by the name which I shall assert once again: "liberal democracy".

I do not wish to let this fatal illusion take hold once again, which has, lest we forget, especially here, pushed our continent towards the abyss. The illusion of strong power, nationalism and the abandonment of freedoms. And I reject this idea which is taking hold even in Europe that democracy is condemned to weakness. Faced with the authoritarianism which surrounds us on all sides, the answer must not be authoritarian democracy but the authority of democracy.

Because this freedom emancipates and protects the individual, a Parliament such as this, your parliament, our parliament, is a European miracle. Peacefully bringing together the elected representatives of the peoples of Europe to discuss their differences, empowered by and conscious of their history and that which has sometimes divided them, is unique in the world. We have kept this miracle alive for 70 years. We must not take it for

granted. We have taken all the risks and gone through the worst situations to get to where we are today and if you want more concrete examples, let's look around ourselves, compare ourselves with one another and look at these powers whose supposed efficiency can prove fascinating for some.

Where else in the world do we have the same standards for the economy, geopolitics, diplomacy and military matters, but also for the respect of minorities, freedom of thought, gender equality and respect for privacy? And where else can we find the same vitality and strength?

There are divisions between the countries even within this amphitheatre, but beyond these divisions, this democratic model brings us together and is unique in the world. Europe's identity goes beyond a freedom-conscious democracy, it is a culture found nowhere else in the world which combines this passion for freedom, the taste for equality, the attachment to diverse and different ideas, languages and landscapes.

This European model is neither abstract nor outdated. It is borne out in our shared commitment to the protection of the environment, the climate and health. It is being developed in our approach to the digital revolution, where only Europeans give such importance to freedom of innovation and fair regulation and the protection of their privacy. This identity clearly sets us apart first and foremost from the authoritarian powers, but also, we must recognize, from certain close allies.

Our American partner, with whom we share so much, is currently facing the temptation of disengaging and rejecting multilateralism, be it on climate or trade. I am convinced that this model is more powerful than any other and just as fragile, as its strength at any given time depends on our commitment and our expectations. We must defend it together every day. To meet this commitment, first of all we need truth and responsibility.

Some put all our problems down to a resented Europe and, as such, turn their backs on their responsibilities by simply telling us that the people no longer want Europe. They make golden promises, and sometimes we believe them. They then duck out of their responsibilities when the time comes to lead their people to the summit of their adventure. Others wisely affirm that we should proceed gradually so as not to rush the people as this would be to play into the hands of the populists. These individuals want us to get used to a well-known rhythm: the rhythm of paralysis, failing to take note of the timeframes we currently face.

I believe this could not be further from the truth. Indeed, it would be handy to dissolve the people or stir up such passions to avoid putting forward a concrete solution. To criticize without proposing a solution, to destroy without rebuilding. It is not the people who have abandoned the European idea, it is betrayal by the politicians that threatens it. We must listen to the anger of the European people today. They do not need lessons but a new project, a need for effectiveness on a daily basis. And those who trade on this anger offer only one dead-end path, the return to the nationalist destruction of the past. We have experienced all the paths and all the consequences of such ideas.

To revive the Europe of peoples, we must therefore accept to take a different route by drawing upon democracy as a source and looking at things as they are: how can we be satisfied with European elections where less than half the citizens go and vote? So let us use this coming year to build a genuine, structured debate about convictions and proposals. We cannot afford to do as we did in the past, refusing to talk about Europe, distributing positions and accusing Brussels or Strasbourg of being the source of all ills. If we continue to do this, we accept a series of smokescreens which may be more comfortable for each one of us, but does not resolve a single problem. Like you, I believe in the nobility and complexity of democratic choices.

As representatives of the people of Europe, you are the incarnation of all choices, you make choices every day, reach agreements and forge solutions, because you have a mandate from the people. It is our shared duty to breathe life into this European democracy which is still, at the end of the day, so young.

This is why, ahead of the elections and within the narrow timeframe imposed by the electoral campaigns, we must bring this debate to life, create this public European space which we have so often neglected. It is in this spirit of experimentation and innovation that I have proposed to hold citizens' consultations starting this year.

I will launch the consultations in France this afternoon thus opening the way to a debate which will be honest, open, hard and difficult but so necessary to know what unites us and what separates us, to get away from the simplistic alternative of answering "yes" or "no" to a general question whose presuppositions and subtexts are left unexamined, and have a democratic and critical debate on our Europe.

I am delighted that all the Member States have agreed to join in this initiative. I know that President Juncker and the European Commission have worked hard on this initiative and I would like to thank them. I also recognize that you, President Tajani, have played a key role in this exercise and I would like to thank you also. And I invite each and every one of you in your countries and across Europe to lead and participate in these essential debates as they are key to the vitality of our democracy.

The second conviction that I would quickly like to share with you, is the need for European sovereignty. To defend the European idea is not to defend an abstract idea, some sort of dilution of our own individual sovereignty, but it is to act in the faith that faced with such great global changes, such large-scale transformations, this time in which we are living, we need a sovereignty which is stronger than our own, which works alongside our own and does not replace it, as only this sovereignty can provide the right answers to large-scale migration, global insecurity and economic, social and environmental transformations. This is the European sovereignty which I believe in.

You have made a lot of progress on this issue and I would like to congratulate you. But before the end of this parliament in spring 2019, we must achieve tangible results on several fronts. We must make progress on migration by getting the ball rolling on the poisoned Dublin Regulation debate and the issue of relocation, but also by going beyond this debate and building the external and internal solidarity that our Europe needs. I therefore suggest the creation of a European programme which directly and financially supports local authorities which welcome and integrate refugees.

The second issue is that of digital taxation, following the Commission's proposal to create a short-term tax which puts an end to the most shocking of excesses. I support this proposal, it is much needed and will also, I hope, help to open up possibilities of own resources for the forthcoming budget.

The reform of the Economic and Monetary Union is a third key front to tackle before the end of this term, by defining a roadmap to enable us to advance step by step on the banking union and establish a budgetary capacity to promote stability and convergence in the eurozone.

Lastly, what keeps us together is not merely a currency or a treaty, it is a sense of belonging, or a culture if you like, and there is much that I could talk about because the implementation of European universities which are genuinely making progress, or the roll-out of Erasmus is essential, but I would like to focus on one of your ongoing projects, which I believe is essential, the project on copyright, creator protection and artistic creation. This abundance which feeds our societies is the cultural mix without which Europe would no longer be a continent of diversity and creativity.

This parliament has particular responsibility for these four fronts and I think France's position is clear. But beyond this, we must build this full and complete European sovereignty to protect our fellow citizens. As regards internal and external security and defence, we have made a lot of progress over the last few months and I would like to commend the work which your assembly is currently doing on the European Defence Fund.

Confronted with all the current tensions with certain neighbours such as Russia, Europe has shown a front of unity and sovereignty. We need to continue this work.

Sovereignty is also about the economy and trade. Here again, we have shown a united front and I welcome the progress made in the last few months on economic and trade sovereignty to defend our strategic sectors for investment upon the Commission's initiative. This was a key step forward in terms of trade, and we will definitely come back to this during the debate, to continue showing a united position for the development of our economic opportunities, while protecting our legitimate interests, our workers and our consumers.

I believe in this economic sovereignty which is achieved by competitiveness created by reforms in each State, by vital solidarity which we must further develop within the Economic and Monetary Union, and by a more realistic trade policy which we must continue.

Sovereignty also covers climate and energy sovereignty. This is key. We must quickly open the debate to increase the European Union's contribution under the Paris Agreement. We are currently finalizing discussions on the climate and energy package, but it is clear that we must start a new chapter. Many of you are already involved in this and I hope that in the coming months we will be able to reopen the debate on a carbon price floor. France will put forward the idea of a minimum price and it will support the idea of a border tax for CO₂. Far from being a technical whim or a technical instrument, this is a necessary condition for a credible energy transition.

The fourth type of sovereignty that we must take further concerns health and food. In our day to day policies and our budget decisions both now and in the future, we must support high-quality food sovereignty. This is what our fellow citizens expect of us and we owe it to them. It is good for our economies and our territories, it is good for our fellow citizens and it is a choice which is coherent with our long-term commitments.

The fifth type of sovereignty that we must defend is, of course, digital sovereignty and I would like to take the opportunity to welcome your work which has led to the creation of what is now seen as the benchmark legislation in all international debates, the legislation which enables us to protect citizens' personal data. While others saw us as trying in some way to propose illegitimate protections, we are becoming the only geographical

area in the world where we promote innovation and disruptive innovation – and I would defend these choices in forthcoming debates – and simultaneously provide the tools to protect individual freedoms.

Lastly, this Europe of freedom and equality is based on a foundation of social values which we proclaimed together in Gothenburg. This social Europe is also a sovereign Europe it is the foundation which we believe in. There are difference, but we must avoid feeding the divergences, the essence of the European adventure is closer union. This is why many of us have fought to regulate posted workers over the last few months. The European Parliament has helped to further improve the compromise reached within the Council and I am delighted that this reform will soon be complete.

I would like to welcome the work which has gone in to it. This is exactly what a protective and effective Europe is about. We must continue to build these European sovereignties. They must be at the core of a coherent project and they must underpin the philosophy of the forthcoming Multiannual Financial Framework. I would like to end on this point, this budget that we will discuss must embody a coherent, effective and unified political project.

France is ready to enhance its contribution. But for it to do so, we need to envisage a full reworking of the budget itself by creating new own resources. I am in favour of digital technology as I am for certain energy resources, by removing the rebates that will be unsustainable after Brexit, by providing appropriate funding for the European Union's work on defence and migration and modernizing current policies and setting conditions, or should I say criteria, for convergence, particularly social and tax convergence. In no way should we scale-back the ambition of current policies, but we must promote new ambitions. France will be working on this in the months to come.

I'm sure you will have understood, ladies and gentlemen, that I believe that the European Parliament is the seat of Europe's legitimacy, its responsibility and thus its vitality. Part of Europe's future is in your hands, Europe as a hub for our sovereignty achieved through and with an even larger sovereignty, the sovereignty which unites us. This union for peace and solidarity offers the world a unique space of stability and security. It is here that the seeds must be sown for a European renaissance, driven by the desires of its people. I hope that in the coming months we will be able to move beyond the divides between North and South, East and West, small and large and beyond national selfishness.

I belong to a generation which has never experienced war and I belong to a generation which is allowing itself the luxury of forgetting what its forebears lived through. Many people today believe that we can continue to favour the usual confrontations, the certitudes of the past, because we are used to them, the well known and well organized divisions. But I also belong to a region and a family which has seen the bloodshed of our past. So the choice is simple, I don't want to belong to a generation of sleepwalkers, I don't want to be part of a generation which has forgotten its own past and which refuses to face up to the problems of its own present. Over time, everyone will accept their responsibilities, but I want to be part of a generation which has firmly decided to defend its democracy, because democracy is not just some worn-out word which we take for granted, it is a word which still has its full meaning, because it is the fruit of past battles.

I want to belong to a generation which will defend European sovereignty because we fought for it, because it means something and because it is this sovereignty which will enable future generations to choose their own futures. I will not yield to any fascination for authoritarian sovereignties, I will not yield to any current temptations, I believe that together, our responsibility for the coming months is to organize a proper European debate, to have a genuine European agenda, as this is the only way to enable our people to choose, those who want a Europe which no longer puts forward new ideas, those who want an inward-looking Europe, those who want a Europe with the same routines or those who are willing to support an ambitious Europe with renewed sovereignty, a living democracy, the one that we believe in. Thank you very much.