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Onderwerp: State of the Union 2026



Dear President, dear Chair,

Today, President von der Leyen delivered her 2026 State of the Union address at the European Parliament (available through this link).

The address puts delivery at the centre of the year ahead. It calls for progress on key legislative work under way and effective implementation of agreed measures. Working together across institutions and agencies will be essential to putting these priorities into practice.

Kind regards,

5.1.2.e 5.1.2.e
Acting Director

European Commission
Secretariat-General
Directorate H: Interinstitutional Relations

European Commission

State of the Union 2026

Address

BY **URSULA VON DER LEYEN**

President of the European Commission

OR

President Metsola,

Prime Minister Carney,

Honourable Members,

'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.' This is how Charles Dickens describes Europe in the days of the French Revolution. And it is also a fair description of the world we live in. The speed of change is incredible. The challenges exceptional. So if I look at Europe today, my take is this: the state of our Union is the strongest it has ever been. The state of our Union can also feel as precarious as it has ever been.

These two statements may seem incompatible. But they are both true. And they reflect these exceptional times. This complex age of great possibilities and great perils, which all countries are seeking to navigate.

In this world, Europe has chosen to forge its own path. And a stronger, independent Europe is now emerging.

This is a Europe that is securing its prosperity. One that is breaking free from its toxic dependency on Russian fossil fuels. That has become the greatest trading power on the planet. That is transforming its industrial policy while upholding our unique social model.

This is a Europe better able to defend itself than ever before. One that has radically overhauled its approach to securing our homelands. That has increased defence spending by almost 80 % in the last five years alone.

This is a Europe that stands up for each other. As we are doing by standing with Ukraine as it fights for its future and for our freedom. Or when we stood up for Greenland when it was threatened. Or when drones, hybrid attacks or disinformation target our democracies.

All of this proves one thing. That Europe is there for Europeans. And that in the cold fragility of today's world, only Europe can provide true sovereignty to Europeans.

And therefore, Honourable Members, this is a Europe we can be so proud of.

At the same time, we all know the threats that we are facing. As old assumptions and relationships have frayed, we are now dealing with an openly hostile world. A territorial war of aggression is raging on our continent; others have erupted nearby. A fight for industrial

capacities is shaping global competition. And a battle of narratives is seeking to weaken confidence in Europe; to paralyse our democracies.

But people's worries are not only linked to these big, global threats. The effects of the many crises are present for many European families, not least on the cost of living or housing. The dizzying speed of change and technology is impacting our jobs, our livelihoods and our society. And it is also having a profound effect on our democracy and our discourse.

We see this in the rise of the extreme, the decline of nuance – even in the way that we relate to each other.

These real concerns are being weaponised to drive a wedge between us. Sometimes from the outside – and too often from the inside. But our path is clear. Building an independent Europe that has the power to act. Nothing can divert us from this. Because in this world, the fate of Europe must remain in the hands of Europeans.

So our choice is clear. Do we want a strong and independent Europe that stands up for its values in this world? Or do we let divisions and dependencies hold us back? Do we want to rally around our European idea that together we can decide our own destiny? Or do we let our democracies be undermined by the proxies and puppets of authoritarians?

Whether it is the ultranationalists or the anti-Europeans, whether it is Russian interference or disinformation, the names may be different, but their goal is the same. They despise our values, and they want to shatter our European unity. So let's not only fight back against that, let's fight together for our European idea.

Honourable Members,

Our economy has withstood the impact of the Middle East wars better than expected. And unemployment is at near-record lows. But the pressures from higher energy prices and borrowing costs are biting for people and for businesses.

Clear fiscal choices will have to be made to ensure fiscal sustainability, while protecting investment. So, kickstarting Europe's economy is our number one priority.

We have a huge market, world-class industry and services, a rich pool of savings and one of the world's leading currencies. And yet, we still fragment our capital, networks and purchasing power.

This is why, when we took office, we put in place a bold plan. To build an economy where innovation and energy flow across borders. Where companies compete and grow across

Europe, and savings finance our future. This is the logic of the Draghi and Letta reports. And together we are delivering. But we have to be faster – all institutions.

We now have the political agreement on the One Europe, One Market Roadmap. And together, by the end of next year, we can and must complete this historic overhaul of the Single Market.

In today's economy, speed is of the essence. A permit or a form, a grid connection or a financing decision. All of this can determine where an investment is made. Where jobs are created. We need to move much faster. This is why we will put forward proposals to further speed up permitting.

Where projects are in Europe's strategic interests, we need to massively accelerate. And where the administrative burden is slowing down business and SMEs, we need to slash that too.

You know that our 12 omnibus proposals are reducing the administrative burden by around €17 billion a year. But simplification cannot be a one-way street. All levels have to have skin in the game. We have long spoken about the harms of gold-plating.

Honourable Members,

Yes, we are doing our best at the European level to cut red tape. But now I think it is time for the Member States to step up. If we are serious about simplification, we also need a pact against gold-plating.

Honourable Members,

Europe cannot remain an industrial powerhouse if its energy prices are structurally too high.

When Russia cut off the gas we fought back. Our supplies are now more diversified. And we have invested in our homegrown clean energies – renewables and nuclear.

But then came the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. And again we bitterly felt the cost of our general dependence on imported fossil fuels. Since the start of the conflict, imported fossil fuels have cost us an additional €90 billion, without a single molecule of energy added.

So, we need to double down on our affordable, homegrown, clean energy. Be it renewables and nuclear, or biomethane and others. Technologically neutral. But they must give us independence and drive down energy prices.

For this independence, we need to electrify Europe. Our goal is to double the share of electricity by 2040. With this, Europe could cut its fossil-fuel import bill by €260 billion a year. But we also need to ensure that the electricity we generate is available.

Last year, we installed more than 80 gigawatts renewable capacity. But six times more capacity is still waiting to be connected. This is why we need the grids package so urgently.

We must invest faster. Speed up grid connections. Develop storage. In short, let's make Europe's future electric. This is a must.

Honourable Members,

We can bring down energy prices, invest and innovate more, reform our economies. But all this is undermined if our companies do not compete on a level playing field.

Our trade deficit with China is now €1 billion – a day. It has reached a tipping point. Some say the second China shock is looming. But it's already here. It shows in our communities and in factories across our Union. It leads to deindustrialisation in the industrial heartlands of Europe. This is unsustainable.

And this is why we are engaged in a dialogue with China to rebalance our trade. But this dialogue must now lead to results. China's weaker domestic demand means it also needs our European market. So, it is in both our interests to work together to find solutions.

Let me be clear: we will use all the tools at our disposal to rebalance our relationship. Words are good. But deeds are better.

And there is another point. We still have too many dangerous dependencies. We are more than 80 % dependent on China for many critical raw materials. 90 % for some rare earths. We have done a lot. But we are not the only ones trying to diversify. We need to urgently procure and build up our reserves.

No country can do this alone. So we need to think differently. This is why we will establish a new European Corporation on Critical Raw Materials. It will help us obtain and stockpile what we need. For electric cars, chips and batteries, clean tech and defence. And so much more.

Not only our industry depends on this, but also our independence and security.

This brings me to my next point, on financing. To be very clear, our budget is about our future. And any modern budget needs new own resources.

We must create the conditions for our companies to attract investment and grow. This is why our work on the Savings and Investments Union is so critical. But developing capital markets takes time. And the needs of our companies are urgent. We need a banking system that is built for growth – not just stability.

This is why we will put forward a new Banking Package focusing on simplification and tackling fragmentation. We know the demand for capital is out there. But we need a greater capacity and appetite for risk.

Our deep-tech start-ups are on track to attract record venture capital investment in 2026. This is why I announced a new Scaleup Europe Fund last year.

A year on, the first investments have been made in companies such as ICEYE. ICEYE was set up by two young Europeans: Rafał from Poland and Pekka from Finland. They initially met through Erasmus some 15 years ago. Together they founded a tech start-up. They developed their idea around satellite imagery. They got Horizon funding. They proved their technology. They grew with private investment. And today they are one of the world's leading space technology companies. With offices in Finland, Poland, Spain and Greece.

ICEYE's story shows that Europe is the home of innovation. And that we can reignite Europe's entrepreneurial spirit.

I am delighted that the founders are with us today. Please join me in welcoming Rafał and Pekka. You are a true European success story.

Honourable Members,

These are Europe's economic fundamentals. But our future prosperity and security will greatly depend on how we manage the tipping points of our time: climate change and AI.

On climate change, this summer was the summer of truth. Almost no part of our continent was spared. In Belgium's High Fens, a peatland formed over centuries burned into a wasteland of ash.

Flames roared from the mountains of Ireland to the islands of Greece and Croatia. In the Alps, ancient glaciers retreat further every day. The impact of all of this is simply devastating: 660 000 hectares burnt to the ground. Some 12 million tonnes of crops lost.

Key rivers like the Danube, der Rhein and La Garonne are disappearing before our eyes.

More than 35 000 additional deaths during the heatwaves. Care homes and hospitals dangerously overheated. And all of this is a mere preview.

These were the hottest summer months ever – but probably the coolest of the years to come.

Science is clear. Europe is warming at double the global rate. Of course, the transition is complex. And we will need to adjust and learn along the way.

But there is no doubt: Europe can, must and will stay the course on its climate targets.

Honourable Members,

This is not about mitigation or adaptation. We need both. And they need to strengthen each other. This is the only way to reach climate resilience. But we need to step up dramatically on preparedness.

We will present a new framework for climate resilience next month. We will identify 100 of the most vulnerable territories in Europe. And we will assess the risks – and at which level they should be managed.

This will give us a whole of society approach – all the way through to the local level where adaptation matters most. And it will aim to make Europe the champion in adaptation technologies – a huge emerging market.

Whether drought-resistant crops, flood prevention or energy-efficient cooling, Europe is already a leader. And we must capture this market.

Today, only around 25 % of catastrophe losses in Europe are covered by private insurance. This means that, far too often, national budgets become the insurer of last resort.

We need to take action to close this gap. This is why the Commission will set up a Climate Insurance Alliance.

Honourable members,

There can be no repeat of this summer. This is why we will also soon present a European Heatwave Plan. We need better early warning systems and better health preparedness. We need urban adaptation and cooling. And we need to support the most vulnerable.

The second point is on water and food security.

We know the risks of water scarcity for our farmers, energy and supply chains. Yet, European pipes lose almost one in every four litres Mostly through leakage. What a waste.

So we will put forward a new European Water initiative. Because water is precious. For our industry – and for our food security.

Crops need water to grow, while livestock need it to survive. Entire harvests depend on it. This is why we will make proposals to improve risk management and address the insurance gap.

Once again, Europe's farmers have risen to the challenge of this never-ending summer.

Honourable Members,

Europe's farmers are the best in the world. And we will support them every step of the way.

The next point is about wildfires. They are getting more intense, more frequent and more spread out.

I am so proud of Europe's response. Of our European assets flying across the continent. But clearly, we need to think bigger. And learn faster.

This is why we have asked some of Europe's most senior firefighters and emergency responders to lead the work. They will look at all aspects of preparedness and prevention. From civil–military coordination to needs for new capabilities. And I have asked them to make proposals, including for a future European Firefighting Fleet.

Our emergency crews have saved countless lives and homes this year alone. And there is one story I would like to tell. It is the story of a Danish pilot, 5.1.2.e

His passion for flying took him all around the world. He settled down in a small Canadian city called Terrace. He became one of the country's most experienced civilian pilots. But Rune wanted to put his talent at the service of a bigger mission. So he came back to Europe to help tame wildfires across our continent.

In July, he carried out many successful missions across Greece. He was then supposed to get a well-deserved break. But the emergency was at its peak. So Rune decided to stay.

A few days later he was involved in a tragic accident, with his fire liaison officer.

Both Rune and the officer were killed. They died as heroes.

I have asked Rune's mother and brothers to join us today as special guests.

Dear 5.1.2.e dear 5.1.2.e dear 5.1.2.e

We are honoured to have you. 5.1.2.e gave his life to save others. Today, all of Europe owes him.

Honourable Members,

The second tipping point of our times is artificial intelligence.

AI is fast becoming a foundational layer for our economy and security. Europe's stance is clear. We want to make the most of AI to improve our society, our quality of life and our productivity.

I am an optimist that AI has the potential to benefit humanity – if we get it right. But, as with any powerful new technology, AI comes with a balance of possibilities and risks. Without addressing these risks, we will never be able to unlock AI's possibilities.

As the frontier models become more capable, these risks have come more sharply into focus.

Models being developed will allow hacking on a level we never thought possible. And they will soon be in the hands of adversaries who see the world very differently from us.

At the same time, the dangers of self-improving models are becoming ever more apparent.

Incidents of AI agents escaping their environment or inserting malicious code are a mere glimpse. After the HuggingFace incident, developers are ringing the alarm. And CEOs of the most advanced companies tell us that it is time to slow down on the self-recursive models. To pace the frontier.

If the people developing the technology are clear, then we should be too. The AI Act is of course a crucial piece to putting guardrails in place. And it puts Europe in the position to shape global efforts on how to tackle this.

So, we will step up together with our like-minded partners like Canada, the United Kingdom and others. We want to team up on model evaluation, verification, early warning, AI security and much more.

And I will invite the main frontier labs for a discussion on how we can support ongoing industry efforts to pace the frontier.

Honourable Members,

It is also true that Europe will need its own capabilities – in particular to protect our national security.

We need to stay in the race. Because this is crucial for our independence. So we need to massively boost our computing capacity. And we will set out our ideas for how to achieve this in a clean and efficient way.

We will also develop new ways to use public and private funds to invest in the most promising European start-ups and companies.

Honourable Members,

By limiting the risks of AI, we can maximise the benefits. We have already done a lot. On gigafactories and tech sovereignty, for example. But the next leg of this race is not only about frontier models. Just as was the case with the printing press in times gone by. It was invented by a German inventor, but was mastered and applied across Western Europe.

We do not need to be the ones who develop the frontier technology to be the ones who draw the greatest value from it. The key is creating the value that AI has not yet delivered. Moving AI from the screen to the real economy and society. On the factory floor. On the hospital ward. In precision agriculture. In our energy grids. Smart grids. For autonomous driving. For defence.

This is where the real value is hidden. And it is where Europe has big advantages. We have world-class industries that sit on the highest-quality data. These data are a precious European treasure. They are what can power tailor-made industrial AI models.

Let me give you one societal example. On breast cancer screening – an issue many of you have campaigned tirelessly on. Mammography screening reduces mortality by around 30–40 % among women who attend the screenings. Early detection is of the essence. This is where AI can step in.

AI-supported mammography can identify earlier and more cancers during screening. And as a result, more women can survive. So we need AI for health. But, here again, we must do it in a European way.

Do I want my doctor to have instant AI access to all the data needed to make the best diagnostic or treatment choice? Yes, of course. But do I want my doctor to be a robot, AI assisted? No, of course not. I do not want a robot to tell me whether I have cancer or not.

The point is that AI needs to empower our doctors. Not to replace them.

This is just one example. We are now focusing on five of the highest-value sectors in which industrial AI has the biggest potential and we have the data: health, transport, agri-food, advanced manufacturing, and defence and space.

In November, we will announce game-changing initiatives across these sectors.

We will invite Member States, MEPs, industry and entrepreneurs to join us in this ambitious European project.

Our approach is clear. We want AI. We want AI to create more value, more responsibly. And at a lower cost and with less energy consumption. But above all, we want AI with human agency. This is the essence of the European way.

Honourable Members,

Many of the risks of AI also spill over into our social market economy. For some, AI allows them to speed up repetitive tasks, to make better use of their skills. But clearly, these benefits are unevenly spread between skill sets, generations and regions.

Look at young people and the barriers they are facing, just to get on the first rung of employment.

Our response must keep pace. From education to employment, AI must help develop skills, improve the quality of jobs and give workers a fair chance.

This is why we need our Quality Jobs Act. And we will deliver before the end of the year.

Honourable Members,

Next year, we will celebrate the 10th anniversary of our European Pillar of Social Rights. And we will keep delivering on its promise.

We will invest in our regions, so everyone has the “right to stay”. We will launch a European Care Deal to address the challenges linked to our demographic changes.

We have just proposed the first-ever Housing Act to tackle short-term rentals and housing speculation.

Because, Honourable Members, staying in the region is not a privilege. Care is not a privilege. Housing is not a privilege. They are rights. And we have to give them to our Europeans.

When we proclaimed this Pillar of Social Rights 10 years ago, the world was different. Our society has changed. In many ways for the better, in others not.

Today, our fundamental values are being challenged. Some people even want to backslide on women's rights. To send us back to an age in which women were second-class citizens.

We have fought so hard for equal treatment, equal opportunities, equal pay.

Look around this room. Finally, there are many of us here: Presidents, Vice-Presidents, Group Leaders, Commissioners, MEPs, staffers and ushers.

So let me send a very clear message: women are here to stay. We will defend our rights. And we will continue to stand up for our values every single day.

This is why, together with my dear friend António Costa, we will host a summit to uphold the enduring principles of our Social Pillar.

Times may change, technologies may change, but our values do not. In Europe, people will always come first.

Honourable Members,

In this age of tipping points, our prosperity and security will not only be built at home.

This year, we have signed free trade agreements with India, Mercosur, Mexico, Australia and Indonesia.

We now have trade deals in place with more than 80 countries – more than anyone else in the world. And business is asking us for more.

I can announce today a new international connectivity project. It will link the South Caucasus and Central Asia directly to the European market – what we call the Middle Corridor.

Through Global Gateway, we will aim to crowd in up to €12 billion in public and private investment. Our goal is to diversify routes, triple trade flows and slash freight transit times by 2030.

To make this a reality, we will organise a Regional Connectivity Summit with the Prime Minister of Bulgaria.

Honourable Members,

These partnerships are a strategic choice for Europe. But they also respond to the fracture in the international rules-based system.

For some, the answer is to go it alone. But this is not an option for us. Europe will always lead when it comes to defending the rules-based system. But we can no longer rely on it as the only way to secure our interests. Or assume that its rules will shelter us from the complex threats that we face.

In this new world, we must urgently reimagine our partnerships. And build global coalitions for our resilience and democracies.

And here too only Europe – with its size and power – can take the lead.

And this is why I have invited Prime Minister Mark Carney of Canada to be here today.

Mark, your presence here is a symbol of the enduring friendship between our people. Our cultural, historical and personal links run deep within the fabric of our societies.

And thanks to CETA, our trade in goods has grown by 75 % in less than a decade.

This shows the power of our trade agreements. We see the world with the same eyes: from AI to climate change, from the Arctic to geopolitics. And we have stood together: on Ukraine, on defence, on raw materials and on supply chains.

But above all, dear Mark, Europe and Canada believe in democracy.

We believe that power does not belong to the strongest, the richest or the loudest – but to all of us. That democracies have the freedom to choose with whom to work.

So, we are joining forces voluntarily. We will move from CETA to an Alliance for the Future to create a common prosperity and economic security space. We will work on intelligent manufacturing. We will create a tech alliance. We will integrate defence industrial bases. We will make the Arctic a flagship joint project. We will work on energy, critical minerals and batteries. On AI, quantum, cyber and economic security.

This is a partnership not against anyone else, but for our common strength.

In short, we want to bring the relationship with Canada to the highest level possible.

Dear Mark,

I said we must urgently reimagine our partnerships. So, I would like to work with you on opening the door for Canada to be the first associate member of the EU.

We share one ocean, one set of values, one way of seeing the world. And we will now build our shared future as well – thank you for being here.

Honourable Members,

Europe's belief in cooperation has always been driven by peace. It is our *raison d'être*.

Today, that peace is threatened. Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine rages on. And threats are mounting on our soil. In the last week we have seen it in Denmark, Lithuania and Poland. The attempted drone attack in Leipzig is further proof. We need to be clear about what this was. An attack using military-grade material, carried out by Russian operatives on European soil.

An attack not only on one Member State – but against all of our Union.

And, Honourable Members, we will not allow it.

We should be under no illusions about what is happening here: hybrid threats facing Europe are *less and less* hybrid and *less and less* threats.

Cyberattacks and sabotage, arson and drone incursions. They are ramping up every day. So, as the threat level climbs, so must Europe's preparedness.

This is why I will propose, together with the HR/VP, a new European security strategy.

We already have many tools. And we are strengthening our work with NATO. But our doctrine, our institutions and our decision-making have not kept pace with the new reality.

Our systems were made for a different world. They are driven by well-intentioned attempts at consensus and compromise. But we need to consider whether they are still fit for purpose.

For instance, Europe needs its own counter-hybrid playbook. We urgently need a consensus on how to respond to certain incidents. Those which fall below armed aggression but clearly threaten our national security. In other words, a mechanism to flank NATO's 'Article 4'.

I believe it is time for Europe's own Article 4 – or an Emergency Security Protocol. When triggered by one Member State, all Member States would convene. To coordinate a European response. To deter further escalation. And to mitigate the impact.

And I believe we must go further still.

For a long time, we have discussed a leaders' format focused on the security of our continent. With partners like Canada, Norway, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and others involved.

This is even more urgent now, given the nature and scale of the risks at play. This is why we will set out our ideas to make a European Security Council a reality.

The urgency is clear.

Honourable Members,

This united front also drives our work on European defence.

The surge in defence spending has led to record levels of investment in our capabilities and forces.

New joint projects are getting off the ground. And we are spending more European than ever before. That is good.

Bigger orders for our industry, more interoperability and more economies of scale. Now we need to take that approach to the next level.

The war in Ukraine has shown us the importance of strategic enablers. These are the critical support assets and force multipliers that any credible defence relies on. From air and missile defence to strategic transport and air-to-air refuelling. From space to cyber.

These systems are essential, and we need more of them. Only together does Europe have the scale to deliver them.

That is why I can announce a new European Instrument for Strategic Enablers – fully aligned with NATO. Because only a strong and credible European defence posture will guarantee our security.

And that there is no room for any kind of doubt: Europe will defend each and every single square metre of its territory.

Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren Abgeordnete,

was das bedeutet, zeigen uns die Männer und Frauen in der Ukraine jeden Tag.

Wir wissen, dass der nächste Winter hart für die Ukraine wird. Aber – wir wissen auch, dass nordkoreanische Raketen und russische Dronen den Widerstandsgeist der Ukrainer nicht brechen können.

Denn die Ukrainer kämpfen für etwas. Sie kämpfen für den Fortbestand ihres Staates, ihrer Identität und ihrer Freiheit.

Und sie kämpfen auch für unsere Freiheit und unsere Selbstbestimmung.

Unsere Aufgabe bleibt es, die Ukraine dabei nach besten Kräften zu unterstützen.

Konkret heißt dies: Erstens, wir werden die Ukraine im härtesten Kriegswinter stärker denn je unterstützen. Gemeinsam mit Partnern werden wir humanitäre Hilfe leisten – sowie die Energie- und Wärmeversorgung der Ukraine härten.

Zweitens, wir werden die Luftverteidigung der Ukraine stärken. Letzte Woche haben wir erstmalig dem Kauf von amerikanischen Patriot-Abwehrraketen zugestimmt. Diese müssen jetzt dringend geliefert werden.

Aber wir müssen auch unsere Abhängigkeit von einem einzigen Lieferanten gemeinsam reduzieren.

Deshalb wollen wir ein günstiges und modulares Raketenabwehrsystem mit der Ukraine entwickeln.

Das Herzstück dieser Zusammenarbeit ist Freyja. Hier bringen wir Kampferfahrung und Innovationskraft der Ukrainer, mit der Technologie-Führerschaft Europas zusammen. Und natürlich unsere erhebliche Produktionskapazität.

Und Freyja ist nur der Anfang. Es braucht mehr. Mit den verbliebenen Geldern aus SAFE werden wir ein neues Programm für Gemeinschaftsprojekte mit ukrainischen Unternehmen auf die Beine stellen.

Drittens, wir werden unsere Sanktionen gegenüber Russland verschärfen.

Der Druck auf Russland muss weiter steigen. Dabei braucht es nicht immer neue, sondern vor allem die Durchsetzung der bestehenden Sanktionen.

Unsere Sanktionen sind schmerzhaft. Sie setzten die russische Wirtschaft enorm unter Druck. Russland versucht alles, um sie zu umgehen. Also müssen wir alle Schlupflöcher schließen.

Because, Honourable Members,

Every day this summer, strike after strike hit Ukrainian cities.

In Odessa, Russian drones struck a crowded shopping mall in broad daylight. Then they struck a second time – deliberately targeting the rescue workers who rushed in to help.

This is not just war. This is a deliberate strategy of terror.

But Ukrainians have proved countless times that their spirit cannot be broken. And this summer, a little girl showed the whole world the true essence of this.

When the war began, 5.1.2.e was a six-year-old girl with a great passion. She loved gymnastics more than anything. But on a sunny day in May, a Russian missile struck her home. 5.1.2.e was rescued from under the rubble. She spent two weeks in a coma. And when she woke up, she discovered that her left leg was gone forever. It seemed her dream had collapsed with her house.

But 5.1.2.e refused to give up. Just seven months after the attack, she was back in the gym with her new prosthetic leg. She trained harder than ever. And started winning gold after gold.

This summer she travelled the world with her Dance of Freedom tour. Her aim is to tell the world about Ukrainian resilience in the fight for freedom. She has inspired people at the Tour Eiffel and in Times Square, in Rio and in Tokyo.

And today, she wants to bring her message right here to the heart of Europe.

Honourable Members, please join me in welcoming 5.1.2.e

You are a great inspiration to all of us.

5.1.2.e 5.1.2.e !

Honourable Members,

The longing for peace is universal. The deep suffering in Gaza and unchecked settler violence in the West Bank have deeply affected Europeans.

The Israeli government's decision to advance the illegal E1 settlement project is unacceptable.

Last year, I called for Europe to act, proposing a number of measures.

It is painful for many Europeans that Member States have been unable to build the necessary majorities for a unified response. Some Member States have moved ahead. Others are considering doing so.

When Europe is divided, it cannot change the course of events.

The months ahead in the region will be critical. Despite these challenges, Europe is leading the way in supporting Palestinians.

We have delivered more aid than anyone else. Through the Palestine Donor Group and the Team Gaza Initiative, we have brought together 65 delegations. Together we have pledged nearly €1 billion to rebuild Gaza and support a modern Palestinian Authority.

Europe supports the right to self-defence for Israel. And the Palestinian people have an equal right to live in safety and with dignity.

It is Europe's role to keep the flame of a two-state solution alive.

Honourable Members,

Throughout this speech, I have spoken about the need for Europe to act together. Or risk being pulled apart.

Once again, this summer, this reality was tested at our borders.

From our eastern borders to the shores of Crete and right across the Mediterranean. And of course, with the crisis in Ceuta. These events are different in nature. But they have two things in common. The first is that vulnerable people are being exploited. By callous traffickers and smugglers. By our adversaries. This is why we have proposed a sanction regime to hit criminals where it hurts most.

This brings me to my second point.

All of our external borders are European borders. So, I want to address the people of Spain directly.

Ceuta's border is a European border. Because Ceuta is Spain. Ceuta is Europe. And Europe will be there for you.

The point is that the only solution is a European solution. And that is the Pact on Migration and Asylum.

After years of work, we finally have a common European framework. One that gives responsibilities to all – and that demands solidarity from all. And it now needs to be fully implemented.

We are on the right path. We have seen a 55 % reduction in illegal arrivals over the past two years. And a further 35 % drop this year. That is real progress.

But the events of this summer show that our tools need to evolve – especially for emergency situations. Europe needs the means to protect its borders at all times. Especially in scenarios when mass movements are engineered and weaponised. This is why we will propose a new European Emergency Response Framework.

It will only be triggered under a strictly defined set of criteria. And in those cases, it will allow for time-limited and strictly defined flexibility in standard procedures.

The message from Europe is clear: we will always comply with our values and fundamental rights. But we will never compromise on protecting our borders. It is we, Europeans, who decide who comes to our Union and under what circumstances. And not the smugglers and the traffickers.

This is why we will also step up our work to strengthen Frontex – especially to speed up returns. We will improve our early warning systems – including in partnership with third countries. We will ensure that we can detect and anticipate online. And finally, we will keep tackling the root causes of illegal migration.

We need to work together with our neighbours to boost investment. To offer young people meaningful prospects – so they are not compelled to gamble with their lives. They need jobs, skills, training, apprenticeships.

This is why I am announcing today a new Mediterranean Youth Skills and Jobs initiative.

Honourable Members,

This is how we can reduce illegal migration. Uphold the rights of individuals seeking protection. Facilitate safe, legal migration with new Gateway Offices in partner countries. And defend the freedoms of our Schengen area.

Honourable Members,

This need for collective European solutions is more important than ever. Because it is also our European democracy that is being threatened.

Time and again, we have seen disinformation and foreign interference seeking to divide us. Seeking to erode trust in our democratic fabric and free media. Election campaigns poisoned by foreign propaganda. Conspiracy theories built on viral deepfake videos.

This is cognitive warfare. In Europe, we form our own opinions based on access to reliable, independent information. This is how we debate, compromise and find solutions – even on controversial issues. This openness is our biggest strength. But it is being weaponised by our opponents to distort debate and truth.

So we need a collective capacity to anticipate, detect and respond. This is why, last year, I announced the Centre for Democratic Resilience. It is already delivering with all the Member States and this House. Many thanks for that. We will step up our work, pooling our resources with Member States and stakeholders.

But we should be under no illusions. The threats to our democracies do not only come from the outside. We see the rise of anti-democratic, anti-European forces. And we know the risks.

But nothing is inevitable. Just look at Hungary.

The date of 12 April will stay in our memory for a very long time. The day the Hungarian people took their future into their hands. They chose democracy. They chose Europe. They brought Hungary back to where it belongs: at the heart of our Union.

Years of backsliding have started to be reversed. The fight against corruption and state capture is speeding up. There is real progress on fundamental rights. On academic freedom. And now, billions of euro of investment in Hungary have been unlocked.

There is of course much more work ahead. But this shows that hard work pays off.

Thanks to our Rule of Law Reports, any issues are now detected early and addressed through dialogue.

And thanks to this House, we have strengthened the link between funds and respect for the rule of law.

With the next long-term budget we must go even further. Respecting the rule of law and fundamental rights is a must for EU funds. It has to be front and centre in the budget. Now and in the future.

Honourable Members,

At its heart, democracy is about giving people the power to choose the society they want to live in.

Today, much of this power has been taken out of the hands of parents. Young Europeans now spend four to six hours per day on screens. Children are pulled ever deeper into feeds designed to keep them scrolling.

What we are witnessing is a great capture of our children. A capture of their attention, their focus, their minds. This is depriving children of their childhood.

What our children need is time to grow into themselves. To grow up with others. To be confronted with all of the emotions and choices that come with real life. They even need time to get bored. Because this is when they have to use their imagination. When they have to talk, agree, disagree, form an opinion, change an opinion.

But when a child has a smartphone, all of this is taken away.

Day and night, parents see the cost: loss of sleep, anxiety, even self-harm.

And in a growing number of cases even fatal tragedies. Like that of Oléa, a 14-year-old girl living in Belgium.

Oléa took her life exactly one month ago – a victim of online bullying.

The story is so tragic and full of sorrow, I was not sure whether to include it.

But Oléa's mum has spoken so movingly about her daughter. And so passionately about stopping this from happening to others.

I want to do her words justice so I will speak in French, as she did.

'Je suis persuadée que sans ces réseaux omniprésents, ma fille serait toujours là. C'est trop.'

Honourable Members,

She is right. *C'est trop.* Enough is enough.

I convened a Special Panel of experts. We spoke to young people. We looked at Australia and others who have moved ahead. And now it is time for Europe to act.

Tomorrow, the Commission is proposing the EU KIDS ACT. We will take a gradual and differentiated approach. Each age has its own sensitivities. And therefore, each will have its own tailored protection level.

No social media under the age of 13. No personal account under the age of 15.

That means, from 13 until a child turns 15, only mini accounts set up and supervised by parents or guardians, with limited features and time restriction of one hour a day. And between 15 and 18, safe design will be an obligation for the platforms.

I am aware that many perceive the power of big tech as overwhelming. And impossible to roll back.

I disagree.

We do not have to accept addictive features. We do not have to accept children being drawn into ever more extreme content. We do not have to accept that girls have their photos used for AI-generated sexualised images.

So we are reversing the burden of proof.

Platforms will have to prove to us that they are safe. Because it is not about our minors accessing social media. It is about when and how do we allow social media to access minors.

Europe has the power to act. It is we who decide our rules, not big tech.

But it is not only minors who are at risk. Addictive design, for example, is harming everyone. This is why we need a wider framework, the Digital Fairness Act. We will propose it in autumn.

Mesdames et Messieurs les députés,

Tout ceci nous montre ce que l'Europe peut accomplir sur ce qui compte vraiment. Mais nous devons aussi regagner le cœur des Européens. Faire naître ce sentiment d'appartenance à quelque chose qui nous dépasse.

L'appartenance à une maison commune. La certitude qu'entre Européens, nous serons toujours là les uns pour les autres.

Car il suffit de regarder par-delà nos frontières pour comprendre combien cette idée européenne est toujours vivante.

Il suffit de regarder vers l'Ukraine et la Moldavie. Vers les Balkans occidentaux. Il suffit de regarder vers tous ces pays proches de notre Union.

Et parce que leur futur est dans notre Union, nous proposerons bientôt des feuilles de route pour les candidats les plus avancés.

Ce processus restera fondé sur le mérite. Et, Mesdames et Messieurs les députés, je le répète : le respect de nos valeurs est non-négociable.

J'ai été horrifiée par les images des funérailles de Ratko Mladić à Belgrade la semaine dernière.

Il a commis des crimes contre l'humanité parmi les plus atroces.

La glorification des criminels de guerre n'a tout simplement pas sa place dans l'Union européenne.

Toutes les victimes des guerres en ex-Yougoslavie méritent que l'on se souvienne d'elles, et toutes leurs familles méritent notre compassion.

Car voilà ce que nous défendons en tant qu'Union : la vérité, la justice et le respect pour nos valeurs.

Mesdames et Messieurs les députés,

L'Europe restera toujours fidèle à ses valeurs. Notre Union est née comme un projet de paix. Pour que notre passé tragique cède la place à un avenir commun pour les Européens.

Des décennies plus tard, des millions de personnes voient toujours dans l'Europe une promesse – parfois aussi loin que le Canada.

Et pourtant, nous oublions souvent à quel point cette promesse demeure puissante.

Au lendemain de la guerre, un Congrès de l'Europe s'est tenu en 1948. Il a réuni les plus grands esprits de notre continent pour réfléchir à l'avenir de la coopération européenne. Pour faire grandir cette idée européenne qui est la nôtre. En tant que société, nous devons retrouver cette faculté de penser l'Europe.

L'année prochaine, nous célébrerons le 70e anniversaire historique du traité de Rome.

À cette occasion, j'annonce aujourd'hui que nous lancerons un nouveau Congrès de l'Europe.

Nous avons besoin de nos esprits les plus brillants – de toute notre Union et de l'ensemble de notre grand continent. Ensemble, ils élaboreront une vision capable d'inspirer la nouvelle génération d'Européens. Capable de reconquérir l'imaginaire européen. Pour que la prochaine génération puisse écrire sa propre histoire.

N'oublions jamais, la naissance de notre Union. Des peuples si longtemps en guerre se sont unis pour bâtir un destin commun. Un destin de paix et de prospérité, de démocratie et de liberté.

Ils n'ont jamais écrit jusqu'où ce destin devait finalement nous conduire. Mais chaque génération a construit sur l'héritage de la précédente. Pas à pas. Pierre après pierre.

Bien sûr, nos imperfections, notre diversité et nos différences demeurent. Mais c'est précisément ce qui fait de l'Europe notre Europe. Notre maison commune.

Alors, Mesdames et Messieurs les députés,

Reprenons encore une fois notre avenir en main.

Vive l'Europe.

Es lebe Europa.

Long live Europe.

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