

Address by Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament
European Parliament, Strasbourg
16th July 2024

Dear Colleagues,
Dear Europeans,

With humility and responsibility, I am honoured to accept the trust you have placed in me to continue serving you as your President. I will work every day to repay your trust in me and in this Parliament.

This will remain a House of every person in Europe. Together, we must stand up for the politics of hope, for the dream that is Europe, for the promise of our foremothers and fathers that is yet unfulfilled.

Two and a half years later, I still want people to recapture a sense of belief and enthusiasm for our project. A belief to make our shared space safer, fairer, more just and more equal. A belief that together we are stronger and we are better. A belief that ours is a Europe for all.

Ours must be a Europe that remembers, that learns from past struggles and recognises the fight of so many who stood for the ideals we sometimes take for granted; for all those who were displaced, who were disappeared; for those who stood in front of tanks and bullets on the path away from the totalitarianism that took over so much of Europe for so long; for all those who believed in better and who dared to dream. Ours must be a Europe that Adenauer, Mitterrand, Wałęsa, Fenech Adami, Havel, Veil, Falcone, Borsellino would all be proud of.

Ours must be a Europe that honours them, that honours our shared history. And there is no more fitting place than here in Strasbourg, at the seat of the European Parliament, in this living symbol of reconciliation, to commemorate the past and build the future.

Ours must become a Europe that is accessible to all, that everyone feels not only part of, but ownership of. Polarisation in our societies has led to more confrontational politics, even political violence, to easy answers that divide our communities into ‘us’ and ‘them’. We need to move beyond this zero-sum thinking that has excluded people, that turns people away, that foments anger and hate, rather than building hope and belief. We understand that the comfort of such easy politics offers no real solutions.

This is the House that stands for the opposite. That wants to build rather than destroy. That is not afraid to take the difficult path. That is able to find and use its voice for the common good. That is the counter to autocracy. That doubles down on the need to fight for the rule of law. That

understands that we must truly all be equal in Europe. An equality that does not seek to make us all the same, but one that offers every person the same chance to fulfil their potential. It is the equality of opportunity that recognises our difference, that sees those different languages, different cultures, different stories that distinguish us as Europeans as our strength.

It is that strength that will allow us to ensure that the laws we pass here work for the people in every village, town, city and island of our Union. We must be the voice that ensures all of our policies work, and that they work well for young people, for families, for farmers and for industry alike.

We share a responsibility to leave Europe a better place than the one we found. And we will leave Europe a better place by creating a new security and defence framework that keeps people safe and pushes back against the expansionist dreams of dictators in our neighbourhood. That defeats the hybrid threats we are still facing. That protects Europe. That defends our strategic autonomy. That keeps the peace. That understands the threat we face is very real.

We will leave Europe a better place by doubling down on Europe's competitiveness: deepening the single market, ensuring quality jobs, concluding global trade deals, completing our banking and capital markets union, and having implementable targets for industry. That keeps Europe's businesses in Europe and gives us the ability to invest in our youth, in research, in education, in culture, in our communities and in the rest of the world: by simplification, by cutting back on red tape and unnecessary bureaucracy that push people and jobs away from Europe. The successes that our people remember the most are the ones where Europe has simplified their lives.

We will leave Europe a better place by giving real solutions on climate. Europe has a proud legacy, and I am convinced that we can remain a world leader and find a way to achieve our targets in a manner that keeps everyone on board, that allows for sustainable development to go hand in hand with the protection of our natural environment and heritage. We can achieve both.

We will leave Europe a better place if we are able to reinforce Europe's social pillar. If we give people hope and dignity. If pensions and wages meet social expectations. We cannot move forward if our youth are unable to rent – let alone buy – a place they can call home. Europe's housing crisis is looming and we must have the tools to help address it – even on a European level.

We will leave Europe a better place if we finally manage to implement proper migration and asylum legislation that includes necessary border management with a returns policy, and, above all, that is human-centric. That ensures that no other mother is given no choice but to put her child into a rickety boat in the hands of criminal trafficking networks. That guarantees that Europe is able to live up to its historic and proud legacy.

We will leave Europe a better place if we are able to harness the opportunities that the digital age allows, that artificial intelligence offers. We have to keep ahead of the curve, and be in a position to reap the benefits and mitigate the consequences of disinformation. We have all the knowledge of the world at our fingertips, and yet people feel more lonely than ever before. It shows how much Europe must also mean ‘community’.

We cannot leave Europe a better place if people are still unable to be who they wish to be and love who they wish to love anywhere in Europe. If we do not remove all the barriers that prevent people with disabilities in our Union from having the same chances in life as everyone else. If we are unable to fight discrimination or stem rising antisemitism or Islamophobia. If hate and violence continue to be a driving force of too much of our political discourse. We must deliver a Europe where everyone feels at home; where girls like Coco from Ireland are protected from their tormentors.

We cannot leave Europe a better place if too many women are still unable to feel part of it. Too many women are still abused, still beaten, still murdered in our Europe. Too many women are still fighting for rights. Too many women still earn less than men for the same job. Too many women still feel afraid. This must become their Europe, too.

We can build the Europe that Simone Veil and Nicole Fontaine dreamt of. The Europe Marie Skłodowska-Curie was unable to fully harness. The Europe that Giulia, Pelin, Ana Vanessa, Daphne and so many more women will never be able to see. We will do it for them, for all those unable to speak and for all those who come after.

I know that together we will leave Europe better than we found it. I know that when the world looks to this Parliament, they will see a House that defends rights, that protects journalists, that values freedom, that understands its role in the world as a beacon of democracy across the globe.

Seventy years ago, Alcide de Gasperi said: ‘The urge for unity is a constant thread throughout history. Let us talk, let us write, let us persevere, let us never pause for breath; let Europe remain uppermost in our thoughts.’ I echo his words and we must bear them in mind throughout this parliamentary term.

Dear friends, we have learnt that we can never take democracy for granted. We have seen that our European values are regarded by too many as a threat. It is a badge given to us by autocrats that we will continue to wear proudly.

The Russian war of aggression against sovereign Ukraine remains at the top of our agenda. I went to Kyiv in your name at the outbreak of the war. It was a visit that gave new impetus to our House,

new visibility and influence. This House helped put the political spotlight on the need to stand with Ukraine, and that light is one that people rely on us to keep shining as brightly as it can.

We will be called upon to do more and we must be ready to go beyond what is comfortable and do what is necessary. We do this because Europe must stand for freedom, for peace: a real peace with justice, with dignity and with liberty. Because in Europe we understand how to heal seemingly impossible divides.

That must also be the guiding philosophy of our reaction to the conflict in the Middle East, where even in the fog of war ours must continue to be the voice of humanity, pushing for an end to the intergenerational cycle of violence, for a two-state solution, a sustainable peace and the return of those hostages still taken.

It is that role that guides us as we mark 50 sad years of an artificially divided Cyprus. We must be the generation that is able to find a way forward under the auspices of the UN plan. We must finally plug the gap that is so dark in Europe's history with a viable solution, in line with Security Council resolutions and our European values.

It is that defence of our common humanity that means we are the ones to stand with women horrifically under threat in Afghanistan; with those girls and students on the streets of Iran; with Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, those unjustly jailed and the movement for a free and democratic Belarus; with the brave Yazidi girls still fighting; with Yulia Navalnaya, who stands tall; with all those around the world who keep defying the tear gas raining down upon them as they fly our European flag high.

That is what Europe means across the globe. This is the Parliament that the world sees – the Parliament we are all so proud to serve. This is the parliamentary diplomacy that will be essential as we defend multilateralism and prepare for enlargement of our European Union. As people look to us in Ukraine, in Moldova, in Georgia, for all those in the Western Balkans who have been denied progress for far too long, we must be ready to extend Europe's hand as they each follow their own paths in a merit-based approach that respects the necessary criteria. We must be ready to face this new world and this new reality. And together we will be ready.

Colleagues, to renew our commitment to Europe, we must – in the words of that great European saint from Krakow, Karol Wojtyła – 'be not afraid'. Not afraid to face down autocrats. Not afraid to live up to our promise. Not afraid to stand up for Europe. Not afraid to keep building a Union that works for all of us.

In 2016, Jonathan Sacks wrote: ‘A politics of hope is within reach. But to create it we will have to find ways of strengthening families and communities, building a culture of collective responsibility and insisting on an economics of the common good. This is no longer a matter of party politics. It is about the very viability of the freedom for which the West fought so long and hard. We need to construct a compelling narrative of hope that speaks to all of us, not some of us, and the time to begin is now.’

Dear friends, we can regain the narrative of this great Union of ours. We can inspire new generations of Europeans. Because Europe is hope. Europe is belief. Europe is all of us. Europe remains the answer.

Vive l'Europe!