



# Europe has an opportunity for change

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The world changed on 24 February 2022. Since Russia's illegal and brutal assault on Ukraine, we are now at a historic crossroads. The weight of the global democratic order rests more heavily than ever on Europe's shoulders.

It is, after all, European democratic values that are being fought for on the streets of Bucha, in the tunnels of Mariupol and in the cellars of Irpin. This is why we will continue with sanctions on Russia and aid to Ukraine. This is why we will reduce our dependencies on the Kremlin. And this is why we will accelerate our moves to build a true Security and Defence Union.

Europe has shown the world unprecedented determination, solidarity and unity against this war. Of this, I am proud and it must remain the blueprint for us going forward.

Europeans citizens have opened their schools, their homes and their hearts to nearly five million displaced Ukrainians. They have really shown the best of European solidarity.

At the same time, European leaders cannot fail to address rising prices and cost of living increases that are hitting hard. Regarding European businesses in a globalised economy shaken up by the consequence of war, the European Union must continue to support them, as they diversify away from Russia.

Europe may not be perfect but we represent a bastion of liberal democracy, of personal freedoms, of liberty of thought, of safety and security. A

way of life and living that has brought prosperity and that we perhaps, for too long, have taken for granted.

72 years ago, cynics mocked Robert Schuman's 1950 Europe Day declaration deeming it to be a utopian aspiration for peace and prosperity. Yet, belief then, in what seemed impossible for Europe is the reason why the European Union is united today in discussing its achievements and the next steps for a common European future.

I trust the next generation. I am certain, that they will play their part for climate action, reap the benefits of a digital economy, consume differently than us all today. However, we cannot expect them to tidy up unresolved crises, that are ours to address. They need us to take our responsibilities seriously. This why Europe needs to lead today.

The truth is that the European Union has never been stronger. The European Union has never had such a determined sense of direction as it does now. We have never had such a sense of purpose to collectively address war on our continent, a climate emergency, our digital transition and energy independence, as well as health concerns related to the Covid-19 pandemic. Our citizens keep asking us to do more in these areas, and this is why we must use this challenging moment in our history, as an opportunity for change.

With the Conference on the future of Europe drawing its conclusion on Europe Day, I invite European leaders to play their part in further educating Europeans about European achievements

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and not to be hesitant about change. Education and the further development of our Union can curb the threat of a divide in our society, between those who believe in defending European values and those who fear.

I invite all cynics, to look up at the bigger picture of what Europe has done for us all.

Let us have confidence in ourselves. Let us believe. If not now, then when?

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European Parliament President

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