

**Address by Olaf Scholz,  
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debates  
"This is Europe"**

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Check against delivery.

Madame President,  
Members of Parliament,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to you today, on Europe Day, in this special venue.

I was honoured and moved to receive this invitation to address you.

Honoured, because you are the freely elected members of parliament who represent 450 million Europeans – the citizens of Europe.

Moved, because 9 May provides the only true, forward-looking answer to the World War unleashed by Germany, the response to destructive nationalism and imperialist megalomania.

73 years ago to the day, the French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman proposed the creation of a new “organised and living Europe”.

The first step saw the communitisation of coal and steel.

In other words, of the very goods that had for decades been at the heart of arms production.

Arms that our grandfathers and great-grandfathers fired at one another.

The dream of the mothers and fathers of Europe was to end this murderous cycle once and for all.

This dream has come true.

We are fortunate that war between our peoples has become unthinkable – thanks to the European Union.

But looking at the immediate neighbourhood of our EU, it is devastatingly clear that this dream is not a reality in all countries of Europe.

At great sacrifice, the people of Ukraine are defending their freedom and democracy, their sovereignty and their independence from a brutal Russian army of invasion every day.

We support them in this endeavour.

The founding fathers and mothers of what was to become the European Union charged the integrating Europe with a mission that went far beyond its internal pacification. It was clear to them that Europe bore global responsibility – because Europe’s prosperity is indivisible from the prosperity of the rest of the world!

The Schuman Declaration puts it thus: “This production [of coal and steel] will be offered to the world as a whole without distinction or exception, with the aim of contributing to raising living standards and to promoting peaceful achievements.

With increased resources Europe will be able to pursue the achievement of one of its essential tasks, namely, the development of the African continent.”

Back then, this aim, “the development of the African continent”, stood first and foremost in contrast to Europe’s colonial exploitation of our African neighbour continent.

For this reason alone, overcoming the consequences of colonialism must be an essential aspect of any European partnership with countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Such partnerships must abandon the Eurocentric view of decades past.

They must be partnerships that not only claim to take place at eye level, but which ensure this.

Establishing such partnerships seems to me to be more important than ever.

450 million citizens, and perhaps after the next enlargement, 500 million citizens, live in the EU. That is just five percent of the world's population.

New economic, demographic and political heavyweights are emerging in Asia, Africa and Latin America – and that is, by the way, an achievement due to concerted efforts by countries and continents that have led a billion people out of poverty.

They will not settle for a bipolar or tripolar world order – and rightly so.

That is why I strongly believe that the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be multipolar – as indeed it has been for quite some time now.

But what does that mean for us in Europe?

Will Europe become what the French writer Paul Valéry has said it really was: an insignificant foothill, an outcrop on the continent of Asia?

We will not answer that question by looking backwards.

Anyone who nostalgically clings to a dream of European dominance, who serves up fantasies of their nation being a major power, is stuck in the past.

Nor will those who permanently warn of Europe's decline inherit the future.

Not least because they totally underestimate one factor: Europe's ability to change and act.

We have proven this ability time and again in the crises of the past years and of the present day. Just think how we came through the last winter, pulling together, acting in solidarity and united with partners worldwide.

The following three lessons are to be learned from this:

First, Europe's future lies in our hands.

Second, the more united we stand in Europe, the easier it is for us to safeguard a bright future for ourselves.

And third, what we need now is more openness and cooperation, not less.

In order to ensure Europe occupies a sound position in tomorrow's world.

A position that is neither superior nor inferior to that of other countries and regions.

But on an equal footing with them, by their side.

[A geopolitical EU]

The European Union must change if we are to achieve this.

We need

- a geopolitical EU
- an enlarged and reformed EU
- and, last but not least, an EU that embraces the future.

I see the European Parliament as a driving force and an ally in all these endeavours.

Let's take the creation of a geopolitical Europe.

50 years ago, here, before the European Parliament, Willy Brandt proclaimed its existential necessity.

“The unification of Europe,” he said, “is not merely a question of the quality of our existence. It is a question of survival between the giants and in the rugged world of the young and the old nationalisms.”

The European Parliament has always acted in accordance with this maxim – a fact for which I am extremely grateful.

You act in accordance with it when you uphold the strength of the law. And when you keep on reminding us all that Europe will only be heard if it speaks with one voice.

Russia's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine has recently shown us all just how indispensable this is.

And consequently the European Union has rarely been more united than in the face of this despicable breach of the European and international peace order.

This experience can form the bedrock on which we found a geopolitical Europe.

As to how, I made a few suggestions last summer when I visited the Charles University in Prague.

- This includes the far greater coordination of our defence efforts, and the development of an integrated European defence economy.

The European Peace Facility, the joint procurement of ammunition for Ukraine's benefit, closer cooperation on air defence between many of our countries, our Strategic Compass, close cooperation between NATO and the EU – all of these are sound approaches that we wish to intensify and accelerate.

- We must set the direction for the reconstruction of Ukraine already at this stage. It is true that this requires political and financial capital – and will continue to do so for the long term.

But it also represents a great opportunity – not just for Ukraine, but for Europe as a whole! Because a prosperous, democratic, European Ukraine is the most unequivocal rebuttal of Putin's imperial, revisionist, illegal policy on our continent.

- Europe must also withstand global competition from other major powers.

The United States of America remains Europe's most important ally.

And we should remember that the extent to which we invest more in our security and defence, in civilian resilience, in technological sovereignty, in reliable supply chains, in our independence with respect to critical raw materials, that is the extent to which we will be better allies to our transatlantic friends.

Our relations with China are accurately described as being threefold, with China as our partner, competitor and systemic rival – although rivalry and competition have certainly increased on China's part.

The EU has seen this, and is responding to it. I agree with Ursula von der Leyen: the way forward is not through de-coupling, but smart de-risking.

- The countries of the Global South are new partners, whose concerns and legitimate interests we take seriously.

That is why it is so important

- for Europe to work rigorously in a spirit of solidarity towards food security and poverty reduction,
- for us to keep the promises we have made with regard to international climate and environmental protection.

A geopolitical Europe must also consider the following:

It is more than sensible for us to swiftly conclude new free trade agreements – with Mercosur and Mexico, with India, Indonesia, Australia, Kenya, and in the longer term with many other countries.

Fair agreements that foster our partners' economic development, and don't hinder it!

Fair – that means, for example, that the initial processing of raw materials is done where they are extracted – and not in China or elsewhere.

If we entrench this idea in our trade relations, we are incidentally also doing much to diversify our sources of supply.

Europe must listen to the world.

For if we fruitlessly continue negotiating new free trade agreements for years, then others will come to set the rules – with lower environmental and social standards.

[An enlarged, reformed EU]

We have already taken one key decision on the shape of a geopolitical Europe last year.

In that, too, the European Parliament was a driving force.

We opted for a larger Europe.

We said to the people of the Western Balkans, of Ukraine, Moldova, and for the future to the people of Georgia: you belong to us. We want you to become a part of the European Union!

And it's not just a question of altruism.

It's a question of our credibility and of economic reason. And it's a question of enduringly safeguarding peace in Europe following the "Zeitenwende" (watershed) of Russia's war of aggression.

A geopolitical Europe will also be measured by whether it keeps its promises to its direct neighbours.

An honest enlargement policy means fulfilling our promises – especially vis-à-vis the Western Balkan countries, to whom we signalled that accession was possible as much as 20 years ago.

Of course, the process of normalising relations between Serbia and Kosovo must be continued, and the reforms advanced in the candidate countries.

Of course, North Macedonia's political courage must lead to faster progress towards accession.

But of course, progress must also be rewarded by us, otherwise the enlargement policy will lose its appeal – and the EU will lose its influence and its draw.

And, in all honesty, we have to admit that an enlarged EU must be a reformed EU.

That said, enlargement should not be our sole reason for reform, but rather the arrival point of our reforms.

I expressly welcome the fact that the European Parliament is working on proposals for institutional reform, proposals that do not spare the Parliament itself.

I will continue to promote the discussion of these ideas in the European Council.

Some things go without saying.

- We have to take more Council decisions on foreign policy and taxation by qualified majority.

I will continue my campaign of persuasion to this end.

The broad support from your ranks is very welcome!

To the sceptics, let me say: it is not unanimity, not 100 percent agreement on all decisions that creates the greatest possible democratic legitimacy.

On the contrary!

It is working and struggling for majorities and alliances that marks us out as democrats.

The search for compromises that also do justice to the interests of the minority – that is precisely what encapsulates our understanding of liberal democracy!

- To my mind, insisting on the respect of democratic principles and the rule of law within the EU is a sine qua non as we go forward.

Here, too, I know that a vast majority of you agree with me.

So why don't we use the coming discussion on EU reform to strengthen the European Commission to launch infringement proceedings whenever our fundamental values are breached: freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and defence of human rights?

[An EU that embraces the future]

Ladies and gentlemen,

There is another key element we cannot ignore – I alluded to it earlier.

We Europeans must embrace the future, without any ifs or buts.

That means first of all sorting out the lingering problems that have been paralysing us for years. The problems that mean that other countries can divide us all too easily and play us off against one another.

I am thinking, for instance, of how we deal with forced migration.

Of course, what we need at the end is a solution which does justice to our ambition to uphold European solidarity.

But we must surely not sit back and wait for this solidarity to descend to us almost like the Holy Spirit.

Europe, as Robert Schuman penned 73 years ago to the day, is built through “concrete achievements”, through “de facto solidarity”.

I thus issue the urgent plea that we finally, before the European Parliament elections, put the seal on the progress we made on reforming the Common European Asylum System in the Council following long and arduous negotiations.

Your agreement on a negotiating position for central elements of this reform last month was a very important step in this direction. Now we should pull out all the stops to bring this work to a successful conclusion.

We surely share the goal of managing and structuring irregular migration better – without betraying our own values.

There is one aspect we could make much more use of than we have thus far: in many parts of Europe, we desperately need workers now, also from third countries.

If we systematically link these opportunities for regular migration with the call for countries of origin and transit to take back those who have no right to stay here, then all stand to benefit.

Steps to effectively protect our external borders are also part of this – as agreed at the European Council in February.

We will then see growing acceptance of smart, managed and controlled immigration in our countries.

And by doing so we are pulling the rug out from under those whose politics are rooted in fear and resentment.

Embracing the future also means tackling with determination what is presumably the greatest task we face. I am talking here about the departure of our countries, our economies and societies towards a climate-neutral future.

The first industrial revolution started here in Europe. Do we not need to strive to ensure that Europe also plays a decisive role in shaping the next major transformation – to the benefit of all?

I do not need to tell you about the opportunities this new beginning brings for Europe. What is important is that the people in our countries also sense this in their everyday lives.

Perhaps because electricity from renewable energies gets more affordable in future, because there are enough charging stations for electric cars and lorries all across Europe, because new, future-oriented jobs emerge in the energy sector or the chip industry because the technologies that the whole world needs for the transformation towards climate neutrality are being developed and marketed here in Europe.

Ambitiously shaping this transformation and yet leaving no-one behind – that is the key project that will define our future, the project behind which we Europeans now need to unite.

[Conclusion]

To quote Oscar Wilde, “The future belongs to those who recognize possibilities before they become obvious”.

It does not belong to those wallowing in nostalgia.

And it certainly does not belong to the revisionists dreaming of national glory and yearning for imperial power.

The Ukrainians are paying with their lives for this delusion of their mighty neighbour.

2200 kilometres north-east of here, in Moscow, Putin is parading his soldiers, tanks and missiles today.

Let us not be intimidated by such outward manifestations of power!

Let us remain steadfast in our support for Ukraine – for as long as it is needed!

At the end of the day, none of us want to go back to the time when the law of the jungle ruled Europe.

When smaller countries had to submit to larger ones.

When freedom was a privilege of the few – and not a fundamental right enjoyed by all.

Our European Union – united in its diversity – is the best insurance for preventing a return to this past.

And that is why the message emanating from this 9 May is not the one sounding from Moscow.

It is our message and it is:  
the past will not triumph over the future.

And the future – our future – is the European Union.

Thank you very much.