



**Speech**  
**in the European Parliament Plenary Session**

As delivered

**Ursula von der Leyen**  
*President-elect of the European Commission*

**Strasbourg**

**27 November 2019**



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Mr President, Honourable Members,

Today, the 27th of November and exactly 30 years ago, the clock strikes twelve.

Church bells ring. Sirens blare. Workers down tools. Factories, mines and shops empty as the streets fill up with dance and hope.

The historic two-hour general strike in the middle of the **Velvet Revolution** saw people from Prague to Bratislava take part in a beautiful, peaceful wave of freedom, courage and unity.

For me, these two hours go to the heart of what the European Union has always meant.

It is not only about parties and politics, rules or regulations, markets or currencies.

It is ultimately – and above all else – about people and their aspirations.

It is about people standing together. For their liberty, for their values, simply for a better future.

There is one quote from the great Václav Havel – one of the heroes of 1989 – that stands out for me when I look ahead to the future. He said:

***“Work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed.”***

I choose this quote, because over the next five years, our Union will embark together on a transformation which will touch every part of our society and of our economy.

And we will do it, because it is the right thing to do. Not because it will be easy.

**We sometimes forget that our greatest achievements have always come when we are bold.**

*We were bold* when we sought peace where there was pain.

*We were bold* when we created a single market and a single currency.

*We were bold* when we welcomed part of our European family that had been out in the cold for too long.

But in the last years, we had to focus on the here-and-now, managing crises after emergency, fighting to keep our unity and solidarity intact.

If we have emerged stronger in that time – and I believe we have – it is in great part thanks to the leadership and the conviction of my predecessor **Jean-Claude Juncker, a great European. He has devoted his heart, his soul and his life to our Union and his legacy speaks for itself.**

**Jean-Claude... merci de nous tous !**

Mesdames et messieurs les Membres du Parlement européen,

Il y a quatre mois, vous m'avez accordé votre confiance. Depuis, j'ai rencontré tous les groupes politiques et tous les chefs d'Etat et de gouvernement.

Ensemble, nous avons formé une équipe européenne exceptionnelle. Vous, les membres du Parlement, avez auditionné chacun d'entre nous.

Je vous avais promis de vous écouter. Et c'est exactement ce que j'ai fait. Et je continuerai de le faire, accompagnée par Maroš Šefčovič et tous les autres Membres du Collège. Nous avons souvent été d'accord et, oui, parfois nous n'étions pas d'accord. Mais ça, c'est la démocratie à l'œuvre.

**Aujourd'hui, ici, au cœur de cette démocratie européenne, je demande votre soutien pour un nouveau départ pour l'Europe.**

Honourable Members,

The team you are voting on today comes from different cultures, countries and has different backgrounds and political colours.

We have teachers and farmers, mayors and ministers, doctors and diplomats, engineers and entrepreneurs.

We have those born before the Berlin Wall was built and those born after it was torn down. Those who lived in dictatorships and those who helped young democracies join our Union.

It is a team with almost as many women as men – only one woman away from gender balance. This shows we have made real progress, but also that we still have more to do.

As the first woman to be President of the Commission, every Member of my College will have a gender-balanced Cabinet – *for the very first time*. And by the end of our mandate, we will have gender equality at all levels of management – *for the very first time*.

This will change the face of the Commission.

Every Member of my team will bring their own personal stories and perspectives on Europe. They will have their own policies and priorities to manage.

But **all together, we will be one team that works in the common European interest**. We will be one team that works with this House and with Member States to tackle our generation's defining challenges.

We are ready. But most importantly, Europe is ready.

**My message is simple: Let us get to work.**

Honourable Members,

This is an unsettled world, where too many powers only speak the language of confrontation and unilateralism. But it is also a world where millions of people are taking to the streets – to protest against corruption or to demand democratic change.

**The world needs our leadership more than ever. To keep engaging with the world as a responsible power. To be a force for peace and for positive change.**

We must show our partners at the United Nations that they can rely on us, as a champion of multilateralism.

We must demonstrate to our friends in the Western Balkans that we share the same continent, we share the same history, we share the same culture – and we will share the same destiny too. Our door remains open.

We also share the same destiny with our transatlantic partners.

Yes, we have issues – without any doubt. But our ties have lasted the test of time. While we are speaking, thousands of students, researchers, entrepreneurs, artists continue to build *zillions* of friendships, business contacts, and science projects.

This myriad of fine threads woven together make a bond that is stronger than any individual point of discord.

Countries from East to West, from South to North, need Europe to be a true partner. **We can be the shapers of a better global order.**

This is Europe's vocation. And it is what European citizens want.

I am happy to have such an experienced diplomat as Josep Borrell on our team, working alongside Jutta Urpilainen, Olivér Várhelyi and Janez Lenarčič. They will do an invaluable job together.

We will invest in alliances and coalitions to advance our values. We will promote and protect Europe's interests through open and fair trade. We will strengthen our partners through cooperation, because strong partners make Europe strong too.

My Commission will not be afraid to speak the language of confidence. But it will be our way, the European way.

**This is the geopolitical Commission that I have in mind, and that Europe urgently needs.**

Honourable Members,

If there is one area where the world needs our leadership, it is on protecting our climate. This is an existential issue for Europe – and for the world.

How can it not be existential when 85% of people in extreme poverty live in the 20 countries most vulnerable to climate change?

How can it not be existential when we see Venice under water, Portugal's forests on fire, or Lithuania's harvests cut by half, because of droughts?

This has happened before without any question, but never with that frequency and with that intensity.

We do not have a moment to waste on fighting climate change. The faster Europe moves, the greater the advantage will be for our citizens, our competitiveness and our prosperity.

**The European Green Deal is a must for the health of our planet and our people – and for our economy.**

Frans Timmermans is the right person to make this happen. And I am delighted that he will be supported by Kadri Simson, Adina Vălean and many others.

**The European Green Deal is our new growth strategy. It will help us cut emissions while creating jobs.**

At the core of it will be an industrial strategy that enables our businesses – big and small – to innovate and to develop new technologies while creating new markets. We will be global standard setters. This is our competitive advantage. And it is the best way to ensure a level-playing field.

But all of this has to serve the European people.

They want and expect Europe to act on climate and environment. But they also need affordable, clean and secure energy. They need to be skilled to work in the jobs of tomorrow. They need to commute to those new jobs or to be connected from home. And we have to make sure that those needs are fulfilled in a sustainable way.

It is a generational transition towards climate neutrality by mid-century. **But this transition must be just and inclusive – or it will not happen at all.**

It will need massive investment in innovation, research, infrastructure, housing, and the training of people. It will require public and private investments – at the European and at national levels.

And once again, Europe is already leading the way. The European Union will mainstream climate financing throughout its budget, but also throughout capital markets and the entire investment chain.

**In regions that will have to make a bigger step than most, we will support people and businesses with a targeted just transition mechanism.** It will cut across different funds and instruments and attract the private investment we need.

To help us achieve this, the European Investment Bank will be a trusted partner. I am particularly happy that the progress it has made to strengthen its role as European climate bank is obvious. This will boost investment in European technologies and solutions the world is looking for.

But there is more to do.

We only account for approximately 9% of global emissions. We have to bring the world with us and this is already happening.

From China to Canada, through to California, others are working with us on their own Emissions Trading Systems. And Phil Hogan will ensure that our future trade agreements include a chapter on sustainable development.

**Because we know: Climate change is about all of us. We have the duty to act and the power to lead.**

Meine Damen und Herren Abgeordnete,

Die Digitalisierung ermöglicht Dinge, die noch eine Generation vorher undenkbar waren.

Weltweit miteinander kommunizieren, Zugang zu Informationen, Fortschritte in Medizin, Umweltschutz, Mobilität, Inklusion. Es gibt keine Zukunft ohne Digitalisierung. Margrethe Vestager ist diejenige, die uns auf diesem Weg weiterbringt.

Wir werden Tätigkeiten automatisieren, die uns Menschen schwerfallen, z.B. das Tragen von Lasten oder Wiederholungsaufgaben, egal ob in der Fabrik oder am Schreibtisch.

Und das wird uns Zeit schenken. Zeit für das, was uns Menschen auszeichnet und Computer nicht können: *Empathie und Kreativität.*

Der Pflegeroboter kann beim Umbetten helfen und Digitalisierung kann Verwaltungstätigkeiten helfen, damit Pflegepersonal wieder Zeit hat, das zu tun, was wirklich wichtig ist: Mit den Patienten sprechen, *für sie da sein.*



Digitalisierung wird uns ermöglichen effektiver und effizienter mit Ressourcen umzugehen, weil wir alles ganz genau werden aussteuern können, Wasserverbrauch, Energie, all die wertvollen Ressourcen unseres Planeten.

Ja, Digitalisierung wird unsere Gesellschaft, unsere Wirtschaft, unsere Verwaltung von Grund auf verändern, tut es bereits heute.

Um die großen Chancen zu nutzen und die Risiken adressieren, müssen wir klug ausgleichen, dort wo es der Markt nicht macht, wir müssen sowohl unseren europäischen Wohlstand als auch unsere Werte schützen, **Wir müssen unseren europäischen Weg auch im digitalen Zeitalter weitergehen.**

Was wollen wir konkret angehen:

*Erste, müssen Schlüsseltechnologien beherrschen und in Europa besitzen.* Dazu gehören mit Sicherheit Quantencomputer, Künstliche Intelligenz, Blockchain, und kritische Chiptechnologien.

Damit uns das gelingt, damit wir die vorhandenen Lücken schließen, müssen wir das zusammen angehen. Lasst uns unsere Ressourcen bündeln. Unser Geld, unsere Forschungskapazitäten, unser Wissen und das Umsetzen in die Praxis.

Das haben wir beim Supercomputer getan. Europa ist derzeit dabei, auf dem Weltmarkt einen der drei leistungsstärksten Rechner zu erwerben. Die nächste Generation Supercomputer muss von uns selbst gebaut werden.

*Zweite, Europa hat alle Wissenschaftler und industriellen Kapazitäten, um auf diesen Feldern wettbewerbsfähig zu sein,* lassen wir uns das nicht klein reden.

Innovation braucht kluge Köpfe, aber es braucht auch Diversität, braucht Freiräume zu denken. All das haben wir hier in Europa, die Menschen wollen hier leben, wollen hier forschen, wollen hier die Zukunft gestalten.

*Dritte, Wir brauchen zukunftsfähige Infrastruktur* mit gemeinsamen Standards, sowie Gigabit-Netzwerke und sichere Clouds der heutigen und der nächsten Generation.

*Vierte, Das Rohmaterial der Digitalisierung sind Daten.* Mit jedem Klick füttern wir die Algorithmen, die wiederum unser Verhalten beeinflussen.

So wie wir bei der Datenschutzgrundverordnung den Rahmen für die Welt gesetzt haben, so müssen wir dieses auch bei der Künstlichen Intelligenz tun. Weil wir in Europa vom Menschen her denken. Es geht nicht darum, den Datenfluss einzudämmen. Es geht darum, dass wir die Regeln setzen, wie verantwortungsvoller Umgang mit Daten geht. **Für uns hat der Schutz der digitalen Identität oberste Priorität.**

*Fünfter, Gleichzeitig wollen wir Innovationen.* Heute werden 85% aller nicht-personen bezogenen Daten nicht ein einziges Mal genutzt. Das ist Verschwendung.

**Die in den Daten schlummernden Erkenntnisse müssen wir nutzen.** Wir müssen einen Rahmen beschreiben, damit Regierungen und Unternehmen Daten teilen und in einem sicheren Pool zur Verfügung stellen können. Ich kann mir keine kompetentere Person vorstellen als Thierry Breton, um dazu eine Datenstrategie zu entwickeln.

*Sechster*, Cybersicherheit ist die Kehrseite von Digitalisierung – deshalb ebenso eine Priorität für uns.

Wir brauchen für die Wettbewerbsfähigkeit der europäischen Unternehmen **höchste Sicherheitsanforderungen und eine einheitliche europäische Vorgehensweise**. Dazu müssen wir Wissen über Gefahren teilen. Wir sollten eine gemeinsame Plattform schaffen, eine erweiterte Cybersicherheitsagentur. Nur so stärken wir das Vertrauen in der vernetzten Wirtschaft und erhöhen die Resilienz gegen alle Arten von Risiken.

Das alles kann uns gelingen, wenn wir gemeinsam vorgehen, wenn wir auf unseren Europäischen Werten aufbauen. Und dann bin ich zuversichtlich, dass Europa auch im digitalen Zeitalter eine führende Rolle spielen wird.

### **Europa kann das!**

Honourable members,

Europe has a lot to be proud of.

We are the world's trading superpower. We rank first globally in exporting manufactured goods and services. We are the largest source and destination of foreign direct investment anywhere in the world.

Our industry is world class in high value sectors, for instance making a third of the world's space satellites. And our companies are at the cutting edge, holding 40% of the world's renewable technology patents.

**We should harness this transformative power of the twin digital and climate transition to strengthen our own industrial base and innovation potential.**

This can only be done through investment.

Honourable Members, we have to scale-up. For years, we have invested less in innovation than our competitors do. This is a huge handicap to our competitiveness and our ability to lead this transformation.

This is why we should not see the next Multiannual Financial Framework as a simple accounting exercise. The world seven years ago looks nothing like the world in seven years' time. **Our budget must be significantly modernised.**

I know that in this field, I cannot only rely on the experience and skill of Johannes Hahn, but also on this Parliament.

But public budgets can only go so far. We must make sure that investment can flow to where it is needed by completing the Capital Markets Union. This will help improve access to finance for small businesses and start-ups to let them grow, innovate and take the risks they need.

And the same goes for the Banking Union. We have to complete it in order to make our financial system stronger and more resilient.

I have entrusted this task to Valdis Dombrovskis, the right person for the right job. He will make sure our economy works for people. Quality jobs, equal opportunities, fair working conditions and inclusion. He knows that we need sound public finances for sustainable growth.

And he will drive our competitiveness and our sustainability. They go hand-in-hand.

**We should never forget that competitive sustainability has always been at the heart of our social market economy.**

We just called it differently.

Think of the family-owned businesses all across our European Union. They were not built solely on shareholder value or the next bonuses. They were built to last, to pass down generations, to provide a fair living to employees. They were built on passion for quality, tradition and innovation.

The things we make today may have changed. But we must rediscover our competitive sustainability, dear friends here in this House.

It was in this spirit that each and every Member State committed to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. And it is in this spirit that Paolo Gentiloni will oversee the implementation of the Goals. He believes in it and I believe in him.

The European economy has recovered from one of the worst economic and financial crises since the end of the Second World War. The labour market remains strong and unemployment continues to fall.

However, with clouds forming on the horizon, Europe should prepare for what is ahead. We need to rely on what makes us strong: our single market, our single currency.

It is high time to complete our Economic and Monetary Union to deliver growth and jobs by increasing macroeconomic resilience. We must use the flexibility allowed under the Stability and Growth Pact to give the time and the space for our economies to grow.

And at the same time, we must support Member States with targeted investments and structural reforms. I cannot think of a better person to lead this work than Elisa Ferreira.

Honourable Members,

Last month, 39 people lost their lives in the back of a lorry, after having been trafficked through at least four European countries.

It is a tragedy that a mother in Vietnam receives a message from her daughter in Europe that she does not have room to breathe.

**For those 39 people. For their mothers, fathers, and friends: We all agree that this should never ever happen.**

People expect Europe to find common solutions to the shared challenge of migration. This is an issue that has divided us, but we should step forward. We need solutions that work for all.

This is the task that I have entrusted to Margaritis Schinas and Ylva Johansson. With their different skills and perspectives, they will form a formidable team.

Honourable Members, one thing is for sure:

**Europe will always provide shelter to those who are in need of international protection.** And it is in our interest that those who stay are integrated in our society.

But we also have to ensure that those who have no right to stay return home.

We have to break the cruel business model of smugglers.

We must reform our asylum system, never forgetting our values of solidarity and responsibility.

We need to strengthen our external borders to allow us to return to a fully functioning Schengen. We need to invest in our partnerships with countries of origin to improve conditions and create opportunities.

It will not be easy – but, let us remember the words of Václav Havel: *It is the good thing to do.*

Migration will not go away – it will stay with us.

Therefore, I think **a Europe that is so proud of its values and so proud of its rule of law has to be able to come up with an answer that is both humane and effective.** We should be able to do that.

And the same team of Margaritis Schinas and Ylva Johansson will also be responsible for strengthening our internal security.

They will ensure that law enforcement cooperation can deal with new and emerging threats. And they will make sure that Europol, our best tool to fight crime, is fit for purpose.

Honourable Members,

When I was a girl, living in Brussels, my little sister died of cancer at the age of 11. I remember the utter helplessness of my parents – but also of the medical staff who looked after her with such care.

Every one of us has a similar story – or knows someone who has. The number of cancer cases are rising, but we are getting better at diagnosis and treatment.

**Europe will take the lead in the fight against cancer.**

Early next year, Stella Kyriakides, will launch an ambitious cancer plan. She is the right person to make sure that Europe's Beating Cancer Plan helps to reduce the suffering caused by this disease.

The point is that Europe needs to care for the things people care about.

***People care about the future of our children and our society.***

Culture and education are what link our history with our future. This is what makes us unique. Our soul, our culture, our diversity, our heritage.

And I know that with Mariya Gabriel, it is in safe hands. This is why I am happy to announce that her portfolio will be renamed Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth.

***People care about fairness and equality in every sense of the word.***

This is why I chose Nicolas Schmit to be in charge of implementing our European Pillar of Social Rights and fighting poverty from childhood onwards. He will put forward a framework to ensure that every worker in our Union has a fair minimum wage.

And Helena Dalli will be the champion we need to break through the glass ceilings. Those barriers holding people back because of who they are, what they believe and who they love. These barriers have to disappear! Period.

***People care about their rights, values and freedoms.***

The rule of law is our foundation and can never be compromised. We must ensure that it is respected and upheld everywhere, with every country treated equally.

We must focus on dialogue and prevention, but never hesitate to take all necessary measures. We need experience and engagement. And Věra Jourová and Didier Reynders are the right people exactly for that.

***People care about the air they breathe, the water they drink, the food they eat and the nature they cherish.***

We can all be happy that Virginijus Sinkevičius will be leading Europe's fight to preserve our biodiversity and oceans, while ensuring our coastal and fishing communities can thrive.

And we have Janusz Wojciechowski who will ensure that our farmers can also thrive as they adapt to new realities.

The twin transitions – climate and digitalisation – will bring changes for all, but let there be no doubt: **Farming will remain a valued part of our culture and our future.**

We need a sustainable farm to fork strategy. From capital access to young farmers to the fact that imported food products from third countries must comply with the European Union's environmental standards.

***And people care about having a say in their future.***

The turnout in this year's European election was the highest in a quarter of a century. But democratic participation does not stop on election day.

We will mobilise Europe's best energies from all parts of our Union, from all institutions, from all walks of life, to engage in the Conference on the Future of Europe. It should be inclusive for all institutions and citizens and the European Parliament should have a leading role. From the Commission side, Dubravka Šuica – an experienced Member of this House – will work closely with you to make this a success.

Honourable Members,

We all know that one Member of our family intends to leave our Union.

And I have never ever made any secret about the fact that I will always be a remainer. We will respect the decision taken by the British people.

We will work closely together to find solutions to common challenges – especially on security matters. But one thing has to be absolutely clear:

**Whatever the future holds, the bond and the friendship between our people are unbreakable.**

Mesdames et messieurs les Parlementaires,

Dans 30 ans, d'autres ici-même porteront un regard sur nos actions, comme je l'ai fait au début de mon discours.

Que diront-ils ?

Cela dépend de ce que nous ferons ensemble. Si nous faisons bien notre travail, l'Europe de 2050 sera le premier continent du monde neutre en carbone.

Elle sera une puissance de premier plan dans le numérique. Elle restera l'économie qui réussit le mieux à assurer l'équilibre entre le marché et le social. Et elle sera chef de file dans la résolution des grands enjeux mondiaux.

**Le chemin est ardu, mais la tâche n'est pas facile. Mais ensemble, nous pouvons le faire.**

Inspirons-nous de cet esprit optimiste et volontaire d'il y a 30 ans qui a fait tomber le rideau de fer.

Pour en revenir à Václav Havel, il y a des millions d'Européens qui s'engagent parce que c'est la bonne chose à faire.

Il y a ceux qui s'investissent pour renforcer leurs communautés.

Il y a ceux qui donnent de leur temps pour prendre soin des personnes âgées ou pour nettoyer un parc.

Il y a ceux qui sortent dans la rue – mais aussi changent leur style de vie pour protéger le climat.

**Des gens qui veulent faire la différence.**

**Nous aussi – Parlement, Conseil et Commission –, nous aussi devons faire la différence.**

C'est dans cet esprit que j'ai construit mon équipe. Et c'est dans cet esprit que je suis ici aujourd'hui devant vous pour demander votre confiance.

Mettons-nous au travail, afin de pouvoir dire également dans 30 ans:

***Vive l'Europe, es lebe Europa, long live Europe!***

