

Translation

Speech by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel to the European Parliament,  
Strasbourg, 13 November 2018

President of the European Parliament Antonio Tajani,  
President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker,  
Members of Parliament,  
Commissioners,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Nearly 50 years ago, Walter Hallstein, the former German Commission President, referred to European integration as an “endeavour of unparalleled boldness”. The year was 1969, ten years before the first direct European elections took place. At the time, the European Community was still in its infancy. Many of our greatest accomplishments – Schengen, the single market and a single currency – were still mere visions. But the foundation had been laid. And with that, after centuries marked by wars and dictatorships, the citizens of Europe for the first time held out hope for a sustainable, peaceful and stable future.

Today, I am pleased and grateful to be standing in front of the largest democratic parliament in the world. Together, you – 751 Members, elected in 28 member states – represent more than 500 million people. That is nearly seven percent of the world’s population. In your House, we can feel the heart of European democracy beating. The debates, which are held in 24 languages, are a sign of this. Your House also stands for another aspect of Europe, namely diversity. It is one of our great strengths as Europeans that we – time and again, and despite our diversity – have allowed ourselves to be guided by a willingness to compromise. Despite our different origins and opinions, we have so far always managed to arrive at solutions that benefit the community as a whole.

More than eleven years have passed since I first addressed this House. At the time, in 2007, Germany had assumed the Presidency of the Council of the European

Union. In that speech, I spoke about diversity as a unifying, rather than dividing, factor, about freedom that constantly needs to be defended anew, and about Europe needing freedom the same way that people need air to breathe. I also talked about a fundamental value that characterises Europe – a value that brings freedom and diversity together in Europe. I spoke about tolerance. I spoke about how tolerance is the soul of Europe, about how it is an essential, fundamental value that defines European idea.

Over the past eleven years, we have also seen how much the world has changed – how, if you will, Europe’s soul has been put to the test. Global political, economic and technological challenges are developing at an ever greater pace, and they are becoming more and more profound. We have lived through a great public debt crisis. The European Union has not been spared the scourge of international terrorism. Wars and armed conflict are taking place only a few hours by plane beyond our doorstep. Global refugee and migration flows are also having a direct impact on us Europeans. The advance of digital technology is changing our way of life at breakneck speed. We are feeling the effects of climate change. Old allies are calling tried and proven alliances into question. The United Kingdom will be the first country to exit the European Union. These days are marked by intensive negotiations, and we more than ever are getting a sense of how deep that impact will be. – I want to express my heartfelt thanks to Michel Barnier for his work.

Members of this esteemed House – why am I saying this? We all realise that predicting developments has become more difficult. But we also realise something else. The likelihood that interests can be asserted at global level by a single actor is steadily decreasing. Vice versa, this means it is becoming ever more important for us Europeans to take a united stance. For this, everyone in the European Union must now more than ever show respect for others and their interests. We must now more than ever have a common understanding that tolerance is the soul of Europe, that it is a key part of what makes us European, and that only through tolerance can we develop a willingness to consider, and fully identify with, the needs and interests of others. This will help us forge true European solidarity, without which successful action is impossible. This solidarity is built on tolerance. It is the basis of our strength as Europeans. A strength that is unique in the world, for three reasons:

Firstly, solidarity is a universal value. Standing up for one another is an essential prerequisite for every functioning society. This holds true for families, villages and sports associations, as it does for a community such as the European Union.

Solidarity is a fundamental component of the European treaties. It is an indispensable part of our system of values. Solidarity is encoded in our European DNA. We support countries and regions, by promoting their economic development or assisting efforts to combat youth unemployment. We help one another when natural disasters strike. When terrorist attacks or nuclear accidents occur, we stand by one another. During the European public debt crisis, we put together so-called rescue packages to help countries solve their economic and financial problems.

These few examples already show that the individual EU member states, and thereby also the citizens of the European Union, are not left in the lurch during tough times and crises. However, these few examples also show that national decisions always also have an effect on the entire community.

Therefore, secondly, solidarity always means that everyone must bear responsibility for the community as a whole. Specifically, this means anyone who undermines rule-of-law principles in their own country, or who curtails rights of the opposition and civil society and restricts the freedom of the press, thereby jeopardises the rule of law not only in his or her own country, but for everyone in Europe. Europe as a community of law can of course only function when the law applies – and is respected – equally everywhere.

Anyone who seeks to solve problems only by taking on new debt, or who ignores binding obligations, also calls into question the foundation of a strong and stable euro area. That is because our single currency can only function if every single member meets national obligations for sustainable finances. Anyone who undermines a unified European stance when interacting with third parties – regarding, for example, agreed sanctions or questions related to human rights – also undermines the credibility of European foreign policy as a whole. Because Europe will only make its voice heard in the world if it stands united. This means that showing solidarity always requires overcoming national egotisms.

I am well aware that Germany has not always behaved well, and that at times others take issue with its behaviour. For example, in the years before 2015, it took us far too long, also in Germany, to accept that the refugee issue concerns all EU member states, and that it must be dealt with through a pan-European approach.

From this it follows, thirdly, that solidarity that benefits all, also ultimately and rightly understood, means solidarity that is in everyone's own best interest. Respecting and supporting others, on the one hand, and pursuing one's own interests, on the other hand, are not contradictory. Quite the opposite is true. One example is our cooperation with African countries of origin in the sphere of refugees and migration. – The President addressed this just a moment ago. – This cooperation helps Europe, because it establishes more orderly, controlled and reduced movements of refugees and migrants to Europe. At the same time, it helps people in the countries of origin by improving their living conditions. We can also prevent them from embarking on what is often a perilous journey to Europe.

Another example is Europe's commitment to worldwide climate protection. These efforts are an ecological and social necessity for protecting the resources on which life depends – also for everyone here in Europe. Europe benefits when industrialised and newly industrialising countries produce less greenhouse gasses, and when all of our economies become greener.

What is more, all Europeans benefit when the euro area, too, develops harmoniously, becoming a haven of strength and stability. All Europeans benefit when everyone joins in European civil protection efforts. All Europeans benefit when we help those who are most severely affected by displacement and migration. It is a matter of tolerance that we respect the different reactions in the various member states when it comes to the question of taking in refugees – because each member state has its own history and demographic development. However, it is a matter of solidarity that we do everything in our power to find a common approach for tackling this and other challenges as a community.

These are hallmarks of Europe: solidarity as a universal, fundamental value; solidarity as a responsibility for the community; and solidarity in terms of one's own rational interest.

Ladies and gentlemen, unity and common resolve are essential if Europe is to succeed. I therefore want to highlight three spheres that I think should be at the top of our agenda.

Firstly, there is our foreign and security policy. We already now realise that we Europeans are much better able to defend our interests whenever we act in concert. Only by taking a united stance will Europe be strong enough to make its voice heard in the global arena and defend its values and interests. It's simply true that the times when we could fully rely on others have ended. This means nothing other than that, if we Europeans want to survive as a community, we must make a greater effort to take our destiny into our own hands. This means that, in the long term, Europe must become more capable of taking foreign policy action. We must therefore be ready to rethink our decision-making processes, also by lifting the unanimity requirement wherever possible – that is, in areas where this is permitted by the treaties.

I have proposed that we establish a European Security Council with rotating member state membership, in which important decisions could be more swiftly prepared. We need to create a fully capable, European military force for rapid deployment to affected regions in times of crisis. We have made great progress on permanent structured cooperation in the military domain. That is a good thing, and these efforts have received wide support here.

Yet – and I say this very deliberately in view of the developments in recent years – we ought to work on the vision of one day establishing a proper European army. Yes, that's how things stand. Four years ago, Jean-Claude Juncker said: a joint EU army would show the world that there would never again be a war between EU countries. That would not be an army in competition with NATO – don't misunderstand me – but it could be an effective complement to NATO. Nobody wants to call traditional alliances into question. But, ladies and gentlemen, it would then be much easier to cooperate with us. When, as is the case at the moment, we have more than

160 defence or weapons systems and the United States has only 50 or 60, when each country needs its own administration, support and training for everything, we are not an efficient partner. If we want to use our financial resources efficiently and are pursuing many of the same objectives, nothing speaks against us being collectively represented in NATO with a European army. I don't see any contradiction there at all.

That would then also involve ... (heckling from the floor) – I welcome that response. That doesn't bother me. I'm used to parliament. –

That, incidentally, would also involve the joint development of weapons systems within Europe. And it would also involve – this is a difficult task, also for the Federal Republic of Germany – developing a joint arms export policy, because otherwise we would not be able to present a united front in the world.

Secondly, ladies and gentlemen, Europe's economic success is a crucial factor. It forms the basis of our strength and determines whether our voice will even be heard in the world. Without economic clout, we will have no political influence either. I am delighted that Jean-Claude Juncker's programme, the Investment Plan for Europe, has had a significant impact in recent years and that we have already launched 340 or 350 billion euros of investments out of a total volume of 500 billion euros envisaged by 2020. That is a good programme to boost investment. I am aware of how often there have been calls for more investment, particularly from you in the European Parliament. That has now been set in motion. But we ought to discuss the issue again in due course. For, ladies and gentlemen, 340 billion euros is not peanuts, but a tangible contribution to greater prosperity in Europe.

It goes without saying that a stable and prosperous Europe also requires a stable economic and monetary union. We intend to continue to develop the European Stability Mechanism. We are working on the banking union. We are working on a eurozone budget, a concept proposed by Germany and France. In my opinion, that should be dovetailed very closely with the medium-term financial perspective. We are also advocating that liability and control go hand in hand. That means that a banking union and ultimately a European deposit guarantee system are dependent on the

prior reduction of risks in the individual countries. The two are interconnected. European solidarity and individual responsibility are always two sides of the same coin. As the European Council – Germany and France at least are certainly working to achieve this – we will have tangible results to show by December.

We will also make progress on one issue that is currently being discussed in great depth and in which you, too are heavily involved – digital taxation. The question for Germany is not whether we have to implement digital taxation – that goes without saying in the digital age – our question is how to proceed. I think it is one of the rules of good democratic behaviour that we take note of the Commission's proposals but can also supplement them. We believe that the best option in an international context would be to find an international solution. We advocate minimal taxation. But if that doesn't work, we can't afford to wait until doomsday, but should take a Europe-wide approach. And that, ladies and gentlemen, is what Germany is working to achieve.

If we are honest, when we look to the future and stop to think about our prosperity, we have to accept that the major innovations now no longer always or usually come from Europe, as was the case 100 years ago and 130 years ago. Today, a large proportion of ground-breaking innovations come from Asia and from the United States. That of course begs the question: Will we dictate the form of the mobility of the future on the continent which once invented the car? It bothers me, for example, that we aren't able to manufacture battery cells. The fact that Chinese enterprises are now investing in Germany is okay. But I think we ought to make a great effort to ensure that in Europe we are also in a position to master a drive technology of the future and to make the production of battery cells possible here, too. We have the European instruments to achieve this. We have all that at our disposal – as we already do with chips today.

We need to be among the leaders in quantum computers. We need to develop a joint strategy for artificial intelligence. All this is still possible, because we have a strong industrial basis in Europe. We can build on this, and we now need to make use of it. Research and innovation are therefore central factors in our future prosperity.

Ladies and gentlemen, the third issue I want to raise is the topic of refugees and migration. During the euro crisis, we had many obstacles to overcome in order to reach a joint solution, but we succeeded. But on the issue of refugees and migration, Europe is not yet as united as I would like. As this is a central issue which concerns relations with our neighbourhood, we need to find common approaches here.

We have indeed made progress. We all agree that we need common European border management. With hindsight I will say that it was no doubt somewhat careless to create a Schengen area of free movement but only now to work on compiling entry and exit records in order to confirm who is in our country and who is leaving. Nonetheless, it is right that we are doing so now. It is right that we are developing Frontex. In my view, the Commission proposals are good. Here, too, the important point is this: If every country wants to retain its national competence and nobody wants to hand over any responsibility to the European border guards, no matter how extensive and how competent they are, they will not be able to do their job. In this area, too, we need to forego our national competences to some degree and work together.

We also need to consider how we can best share the workload with regard to development assistance, development cooperation and economic development in Africa. We are now seeing outstanding results – that wouldn't have been possible two or three years ago – when individual member states work in cooperation with the Commission in specific African countries and thereby achieve so much more than if we all headed off there to do our own thing. Yet we have a great deal more to learn in this area. Nonetheless, I believe we are moving in the right direction.

Another priority needs to be for us to develop a common European asylum procedure. If every country makes decisions based on different criteria, the people affected are aware of this and then it is no wonder that secondary movement takes place within the Schengen area. It is vital that just as we are developing a common level playing field for the internal market, we make the effort to develop common standards also on such sensitive issues as asylum law and humanitarian responsibility. Otherwise we will not be able to handle the task with which refugees and migration confront us.

Ladies and gentlemen, those were just three examples of many. The protests show that I have hit the mark. That is good, and I am honoured. I believe that people want Europe to tackle the very issues that are uppermost in their minds. People want a Europe that provides answers to their burning questions. That doesn't mean that Europe has to have a finger in every pie, as it were. It is still the case that not every problem in Europe is a problem for Europe. Solidarity does not mean omnipresence. But solidarity does mean that Europe engages itself where it is needed and that it is then able to act firmly, decisively and effectively.

I am convinced that Europe is our best chance for lasting peace, lasting prosperity and a secure future. Our gathering in Paris at the invitation of the French President to remember the brutalities of the First World War 100 years ago ought to have reminded us once again what happens when nations have no respect for one another and what happens when alliances such as the League of Nations, which was founded in the wake of the First World War, fail. Even greater horrors followed. This is why we cannot afford to squander this European opportunity. We owe that to ourselves, we owe it to generations past, and we owe it to future generations. That means that nationalism and egoism must never again be allowed to gain a foothold in Europe. Rather, tolerance and solidarity are our common future. Ladies and gentlemen, that is something absolutely worth striving for.

Thank you very much.