

Our Europe can be more

The story of Europe is one that has been forged in crisis. At every point in modern day history, when Europe faced a reckoning, we have responded by moving closer together. That doctrine has enabled us to weather the worst of storms and allowed our institutions to respond to the concerns of people. To make tangible differences in people's lives. The doctrine of Europe is one that consistently places cooperation above competition. It is one that has created prosperity, strong democracies, iron-fenced protection of personal liberties. Just in the last few years, we have faced banking meltdowns, sovereign debt crises, migration pressures followed by a global pandemic the likes of which we had never seen before. All these events have pushed Europe closer together and we have emerged stronger.

That basis, that unity is now being tested again by the perfect storm of a combination of war on our doorstep, unprecedented inflation, electricity and energy price rises, a climate catastrophe causing our rivers to run dry and our forests to combust, food insecurity and a fast-emerging cost-of-living crisis.

Once again, Europe is being tested. Once again Europe must respond. Once again we will need to work together. Once again, Europe must adapt. And once again the European Parliament stands ready to play its part.

Heating our homes, fuelling our industries and driving our cars is becoming more difficult. Inflation is keeping prices high. We know this. But when we are under the most pressure -- that is when we will need to stand up and stand firm like never before. That is when theoretical Europe must be met with practical leadership. With speed, action and courage. And Europe must rise to meet that challenge. Whether it is tackling cost of living, electricity prices, climate change, defence, food security or supporting Ukraine. Unity is the only way forward.

Europe must be more. This was the clear call, which was voiced in May 2022 at the European Parliament, in the conclusions of the yearlong citizens' Conference on the Future of Europe. This week, the President of the European Commission will put forward proposals in her annual State of the European Union address.

For the European Parliament, these core issues raised by citizens must be central to the proposals:

We must achieve a comprehensive security and defence union. Our security and defence apparatus and infrastructure must be overhauled. The brutal, illegal, uncalled for invasion of Ukraine has showed just how much the world has changed since February. We need to make better use of our defence spending and avoid duplication in a pan-European defence capacity, in complement with NATO and not in competition.

Secondly, we need to address Europe's energy resilience and autonomy. We need to cut dependencies on undependable suppliers. Tied to that are the immediate measures that must be taken to reduce the impact of rising cost of electricity. Price hikes hitting families across Europe must be addressed urgently, also to ensure political stability. At the same time, we must continue to meet our ambitious climate goals and speed-up our energy and green transition.

Thirdly, the pandemic revealed shortfalls in Member State health care systems. The European Parliament is calling for an EU 'right to health'. When it comes to curtailing the spread of viruses or facilitating access to specialised treatments, the solution often lies in *more* cross-border cooperation.

This ramping up of efforts will come at a cost. In order to scale up our response to soaring difficulties we need to modernise the EU budget. Our budget should be more crisis resilient and more agile to meet quickly shifting or unexpected priorities.

The coming months will be trying, but we have already proven to ourselves that with focused determination Europeans are well able to rally against adversity. The origin of European cooperation and integration stemmed from a desire in solidarity with one another to overcome

post world war hardship. Europe can be confident in its ability to tackle far-reaching upsets. It has proven its strength.

This is Europe's moment. We can be more - together.

Roberta Metsola

President of the European Parliament