

European Parliament President Roberta Metsola
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Dear colleagues,

We meet here again as Europe's citizens - the people we are here to represent - look to us for decisions and leadership.

They are worried. The spill-over effects of Russia's assault on the way of life we have long taken for granted means our people are feeling less stable today, less secure, less confident in the future.

They are looking to us for direction, for a way out that will bring back the peace of mind so many have lost. We must respond forcefully - in unison - and proportionately. It is time for giant leaps to replace small steps. That is the only way forward whether it is on tackling spiralling electricity prices, shrinking gas supplies, rising inflation - which has not yet peaked - or responding to the illegal, unjustified and brutal Russian invasion of sovereign Ukraine.

The pandemic has shown us that we are vulnerable when it comes to health, the Russian invasion has shown us that we are vulnerable when it comes to security and defence. The weaknesses of our energy policy have been exposed and exploited. Our population is aging and global supply chains are under pressure.

Our unity must be real - the lowest common denominator should not be the benchmark. We need to move faster and deeper.

This is true on energy: even if we are in a better position than a few months ago, we are still vulnerable to a relative gas shortage coupled with inelastic demand and the external factor of weaponisation of gas by Russia. In realising that Europe has inadequate supply, inadequate storage and high exposure led to panic on the markets and price volatility.

There are holes that we need to fix. Common actions, solidarity in gas supply, and the creation of the credible energy single market need to happen, if we are to build resilience in the future.

The Commission put a number of urgent proposals on the table. From taxing windfall profits, decreasing demand for gas, or setting a new benchmark for LNG. The European Parliament has welcomed these measures, but at the same time there is a sense it could be too little for our European businesses with now impossible running costs or families who can no longer afford to pay their bills.

We need to think longer-term. We need a credible vision for our energy market of the future. A joint procurement mechanism for gas is necessary. It is the only way we can find a common way out and not outbid each other when it matters the most. We need to look again at the possibility of decoupling electricity prices from gas prices - as an extraordinary, temporary measure.

Times are changing and they call for new ways of doing things. We must be ready. It is not easy, we all have our domestic pressures and realities, but going alone should not be an option. The stakes are too high. We need to work together - in real solidarity. And today's news on new Green Energy corridor connecting Portugal, Spain and France is a good example of how we can find common solutions.

The Parliament remains ready to play its part - and we can do so quickly, as we did on gas storage earlier this year, and as we will do on REPowerEU. We understand the scale of the challenge. We are ready. For a long-term revision of our energy market, the European Parliament stands ready to work and ready to deliver.

The European Parliament is a partner and an ally. We share the same goals. We serve the same citizens. Members of the European Parliament bring the message back to their home countries. They can explain to citizens what we are doing and why it is necessary. This is crucial in order to maintain our unity and

counter Russian narrative and disinformation, which aim to destabilise and disunite us.

We hear the concerns of families and businesses. Swift and urgent solutions do not mean we bypass our ordinary legislative procedures. The European Parliament adds European democratic legitimacy to proposals that we adopt - that is why we should have full parliamentary involvement with new proposals on the table. It matters to people.

We can get our bills under control and we can do that without abandoning our long-term climate goals, but we can only do that together.

Rising energy prices is of course fuelling inflation, resulting in less disposable income for households and businesses. Next to be put under pressure are our banks and the financial sector - with higher mortgages impacting our housing market. Double-digit inflation and rapidly rising interest rates are causing a tsunami, wiping value off people's homes, salaries and national budgets.

Our economy recovered well after the pandemic, thanks to our economic governance framework and our NextGenerationEU. Now, we need to set the right conditions to stimulate private investment, to set the EU economy back on a stable path of growth.

Solutions cost money. In the pandemic we created debt that will need to be repaid using our own resources - which we know are not enough. Servicing more debt, creating higher deficits requires our economies to grow. Growth is the only way out. That brings me back to energy - we need to lower prices to help a return to solid economic growth everywhere. That is how we can cushion the social and economic impact of the crises we are facing and focus on the most vulnerable.

Our economy needs this boost. It is not only a matter of prosperity, but a matter of security.

That also means looking again at the EU Budget. The new MFF has already encountered multiple challenges. It lacks the resources and flexibility to respond to crises or to finance new priorities. We need a revision to adapt to the times.

Off-budget solutions or simply a review will not give people the answers they expect from us.

I know the reluctance to re-open. I know the political realities, but the MFF needs to be future proofed with in-built flexibility. Ceilings should be raised where necessary to reflect emerging needs and new priorities.

We are trying find the money to provide humanitarian aid to Ukraine, to tackle the global food crisis, to deal with the natural disasters, and to finance our policy ambitions on energy, defence and strategic autonomy. And this without counting the hundreds of billions needed for the reconstruction in Ukraine.

And instead of spending the limited money we have in the EU budget on these priorities, we have to use it to pay back the NextGenerationEU debt because we have not agreed on new Own resources and the rising interest rates oblige us to pay much more money than planned. It is additional 450 million euros in 2023. It is becoming harder to explain.

Debt repayment is not discretionary - we must pay it back. If interest rates remain high, NextGenerationEU debt repayment will wipe out the budget's entire crisis response capacity and start eating into the EU programmes.

And none of this can be done without stepping up our help to Ukraine. The issues we face are interconnected. They are different sides to the same issue - fuelled by Russian aggression and expansionist theories that belong in the back pages of our history books.

The wave of indiscriminate strikes targeting cities and civilian infrastructure across Ukraine is shocking, but it must be met with decisive action including:

- Increased sanctions
- More military support especially air defence systems, tanks and heavy armour
- Strengthened efforts in addressing the war crimes committed in Ukraine

This is important if we are to push for peace - and we must push for peace. But it must be a real, sustainable and lasting peace. Too many of the nations you lead have experience of occupation - many of you first hand. We must learn from Europe's painful history and understand whom we are dealing with. Peace is our goal. And real peace can only come with justice - with a Tribunal to look into war crimes, their perpetrators and restitution.

We have to be ready to go further. Sanctions have their critics I know - but they are necessary, they work and they must go deeper still - including with Lukashenko in Belarus.

Europe's future lies in its ability to adapt with speed, fortitude and unity. Because here we must recognise that any sign of disunity will be exploited and used against us.

Russia's brutal, illegal, and unjustifiable invasion of Ukraine shone a spotlight on how we must adapt and how we must keep defence and security at the top of our agenda to counter hybrid attacks. When Russia inevitably escalates in winter, we need to start thinking of Europe as a community with 43 million additional people that rely on us. We must be ready.

And the reality is that our defence depends on Ukraine and the aid we provide them: The air defence systems. The tanks. The financial support. The political support.

Finally I want to mention Moldova, the poorest European state, hit hard with the consequences of the Russian war on Ukraine whether in economic, humanitarian, energy or even political terms. Moldova needs our attention and practical assistance.

I know how much you have sacrificed: politically, financially, militarily. I know that asking to go further and faster will not be easy. But easy has never been a criteria for action. It is necessary. It is critical and it is on us to deal with and I am convinced that we can do so together.