

Thank you Charles.

And welcome also to the new President of the Republic of Cyprus Nikos Christodoulides who joins us for the first time. We share a commitment to the reunification of your country under the auspices of the UN plan. You can rely on the European Union and on our solidarity.

And solidarity is what we must keep pushing for with Ukraine - in political, economic, humanitarian and military terms. And it will become harder. We are seeing war fatigue coupled with Russian propaganda having an impact. It will get harder to keep explaining why it is existential for Europe to stand with Ukraine. Why the price of liberty is not too high. But we must and I am grateful for the unity around this table.

We need to keep thinking of the next steps. Peace must remain the ultimate goal and the EU is uniquely placed to help that - but in order for there to be peace there must be a Ukraine. And there will not be without our support.

The delivery and joint procurement ammunition agreement represents a landmark moment - one of resolve and resilience. Ukraine needs this. Europe needs this. This is as much about the preservation of Ukraine as it is about the preservation of Europe.

Advancing on the joint procurement brings us one-step further towards a more focused European defence and security policy. It is the 'more Europe' we need again.

Our ten packages of sanctions have hit Russia hard. But, we must close any remaining loopholes - areas in our system that still allow Putin's allies to benefit from access to the EU. Sanctions work, they are necessary and proportionate - but they must be properly implemented and we must keep engaging with third countries to bring them on board too.

We must also do more to prevent the humanitarian situation in Ukraine spiralling further out of control - particularly for children.

There are children who are victim of unlawful deportation and the unlawful transfer from occupied areas of Ukraine to Russia. Some 16,000 children have been impacted.

Putin and his accomplices at every level must be sanctioned and held to account. That is why we welcome the International Criminal Court's arrest warrants. It is this momentum, that we must build on and one that can work in sync with a need to establish a special international Tribunal for the crime of aggression committed against Ukraine.

As a European Union, we are strongest when we take joint responsibility and act together as we are doing now.

I also want to highlight the situation in Moldova. Maia Sandu is performing miracles in ensuring the pillars of democracy remain standing. In standing firm against Russian attempts to undermine them. My appeal is for us to keep offering practical, economic and political support as we have done.

The same is true for our support for democratic forces in Georgia and Belarus. And our message to those fighting for women, life and liberty in Iran.

Russia's agenda is clear. They wish to retreat to the false comfort of splitting the world into opposing factions. We have to stand against that.

The prosperity of Europe and the improvement of European citizens' lives lies at the cornerstone of our European Union construction. We can never lose sight of this. Historically, Europe has managed, time and again, to come out stronger when faced with adversity.

Our Single Market provides a springboard for European businesses to enter global markets. Our EU economies are competitive. They need to remain so. As a market of 450 million inhabitants, together we are stronger.

The European Union's twin transition can happen, with the commitment of our people, but only if we create favourable conditions for that transition to occur. We need to explain that going green will pay-off for people, businesses and their families.

Going green cannot be the reserve of those who can afford expensive green cars and costly energy-efficient insulation systems. We cannot create a societal divide between those who can and those who can't go green because making ends meet has become more urgent. We must leave nobody behind here.

Without public support, it won't happen.

For this we need pointed investments, with clear objectives and performance indicators. Businesses will only invest in the green transition with a clear business case and incentives. With clear targets, we can steer the process and maintain our competitive edge.

Investing in European leadership, investing in strategic technologies like solar and wind energy, heat pumps, and batteries will benefit us all. We have to do better with easier access to existing funding, and less red tape. And as I have said before, we do need a level-playing field, but let's avoid a protectionist race.

We also need private investment, so that our SMEs and start-ups stay in Europe. It is crucial to complete the Capital Markets Union, which is still too fragmented.

The European Parliament is committed to working efficiently on proposals on the electricity market, the Green Industrial Plan, the Net-Zero Industry Act, the Critical Raw Material Act.

What matters for all of us is legislative predictability. If concerns exist on legislative proposals, we need to raise them with one another in good time to find pragmatic solutions.

The Silicon Valley Bank and Credit Suisse fallout has hit many headlines. Our Eurozone banking sector is resilient. Together, we have put robust safeguards in place to protect our EU Banking sector. The European Central Bank stands ready to intervene if necessary, while so far, the impact on the EU seems limited.

Nevertheless, completing the Banking Union remains a priority to ensure further financial stability, before the next shock.

On migration, the European Parliament will play its part. We are ready to vote next week but we ask you to deliver on the remaining solidarity files. By which I mean the regulation on asylum and migration management and the regulation on crisis and force majeure.

That is how we achieve the critical balance that we need on these issues that will allow us: to protect borders, to offer protection and dignity to those who need it, to return efficiently those who are not eligible and to smash the business model of human traffickers profiting off the most vulnerable.

We must continue to act in unison and deliver on more Europe where it matters.

More Europe does not mean making everyone homogenous. We are different and proud to be. This narrative about Europe trying to make everyone the same is simply not correct. We value our unity in diversity. We understand that we must be big on big things and small on small things - and there is nothing bigger for us to deal with than the issues on the table today.

Thank you.