

**President Metsola's remarks at the Informal European Council**  
*6th October, Granada*

Thank you and good morning everyone.

I want to focus my intervention today on a couple of key challenges we face, and how the European Parliament can help in addressing them.

Migration remains one of Europe's most pressing concerns. Election after election, it continues to rank as one of the top concerns for European citizens, across all Member States. Yet for years, we have not managed to make sufficient headway to address the issue. We are now at a point where we have a way forward that breaks this deadlock. What is on the table can deliver on people's expectations without forcing them to retreat to the fringes or extremes. One that protect our borders and that is fair with those in need of protection, that is firm with those who are not eligible, and that is strong with criminal networks preying on the most vulnerable. Is it perfect? Of course not.

But we are closer than ever and with only half a year to go before the end of our mandate, we can find an agreement on the Asylum and Migration Pact before the end of term.

Compromise is what moves us forward. Compromise is not a dirty word.

The European Parliament's commitment to finalising this package remains unwavering. We cannot let this debate dominate and polarise yet another European elections campaign, without presenting the legislative tools that will serve to address it.

Where there is a political will, there is a way. We saw that with the pandemic, with us standing up against Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine. Like we are addressing our climate challenges, disengaging from Russian energy, setting global standards in the digital sector and laying foundations for the years to come.

In the last years, we have done things that many thought impossible. We can do it again.

We came together in a manner that has seen our Union grow stronger, more autonomous and more impactful than it has ever been before.

The world is changing and we must adapt and change with it too. We must keep striving to make our Europe a place of equality of opportunity, of safety and security, of prosperity, dignity and jobs - where everyone can reach their full potential, without different tiers of access. That means finding ways forward that matter to a new generation and new wave of Europeans and European Member States.

Enlargement is the Union's strongest geopolitical tool. And especially in this new geostrategic environment, an enlarged EU that is based on clear objectives, criteria and merit, serves as an investment in peace, security, stability and prosperity on the European continent. It is a process with an outcome that benefits everyone involved.

That is why the European Parliament had called for Ukraine and Moldova to receive EU candidate status. This status gives a clear European perspective to these nations and serves as a powerful impetus for advancing democratic reforms. A quick look back at the last 20 years

can illustrate the transformative power of enlargement. That is why we want to go the next step by the end of the year if those countries are ready.

Now we need to match our rhetoric with action. We must match their ambition with our ability and willingness to change. We need to start a genuine discussion on EU absorption capacity and internal reform. This is already long overdue. These states will be ready to join, and we must be ready too. Kicking the can further down the road will not solve anything.

That will require all of us to keep this discussion high on our agendas in the upcoming mandate. It will then be up to each candidate country to continue working hard to comply with the accession criteria. And genuine efforts must be made to solve all outstanding bilateral disputes. Of course, each candidate country will be required to follow their own path. We cannot cut corners, but my appeal here is that we need to be ready. If we leave everybody pending then we shouldn't be surprised if the vacuum we leave behind is filled by someone else.

Enlargement leads to more strategic autonomy, as does a budget which is fit for purpose.

On the proposal that we have on our budget revision: funds are finite. The pandemic, the invasion of Ukraine, natural disasters and the cost of living crisis has taken its toll. Rising interest rates have pushed up our NextGenerationEU borrowing costs. The combined effect of all this is that the EU's budget is stretched to its limit.

And we have a duty to react.

The world has changed beyond recognition in the last years, and so have our priorities.

I think we can all agree that we need more resources to address migration, to continue supporting Ukraine on a long-term and sustainable path.

We also all agree to support Member States struck by natural disasters, quickly and effectively. When they look to Europe the most, we must be ready.

And we need to put our money where our mouth is when it comes to our competitiveness - that is how we generate real, sustainable economic growth, which is necessary to sustain our ambitions.

We have been resourceful in re-deploying already existing funds. But going forward we need to be straightforward about what this means. Allowing our borrowing costs to eat into, or even completely cut, programmes that make us competitive and that our citizens directly benefit from, such as Erasmus and Horizon, is not something people would easily accept.

This week we marked 33 years since the reunification of Germany and Europe with it. It was described in 1990 as 'nothing short of a miracle'. To me rather than a miracle, it showed the power of politics and diplomacy to find solutions. Europe is about discovering the political will to overcome seemingly impossible odds and differences, about finding ways forward that transform lives, about solving inter-generational geo-political issues and changing the course of history.

Whether it is on migration, on our MFF or on enlargement, we need a dose of that spirit again.

The European Parliament is ready. Ready to bring in the views of our citizens and to take the messages back home to them. Ready to play its part to bring EU citizens on board. Because that is the only way of ensuring that our reforms are ultimately successful.