

## **President Metsola's remarks at the European Council, 27th June 2024**

Thank you Charles.

Let me start by saying that the European Parliament welcomes the new security cooperation pact between Ukraine and the European Union.

I was last in Kyiv on the 9th of May, the Ukrainian authorities ran me through all the diligent work and reforms in preparation of the opening of this new chapter in our relations. And let me say that the fact that President Zelenskyy was here to mark the occasion is of important symbolical value and bears proof to our mutual commitment to our common security and shared destiny.

The step taken to begin formal EU membership talks with Ukraine and Moldova this month is significant and important. The European Parliament has been a strong advocate for the launch of EU accession negotiations. I will not reiterate all the benefits of our strongest geopolitical tool, but I do want to take a moment to thank the Belgian Presidency for convening these first intergovernmental conferences and in doing so, taking an important strategic step for the European Union. Getting our Union ready for enlargement must remain a top priority in our next institutional cycle.

It has been two and a half weeks since the European elections. Today we can say that we have a much clearer view of what people expect us to deliver on over the next five years. The challenge is now to turn these electoral messages into a political programme for the European Union. One that is serious, deliverable and implementable.

We have all come out of a lengthy election campaign period, people spoke and we should all now take on board the messages they sent - about what they want to see from us here.

People have called for the robust defence of our values and for security to remain a top priority. Meaning that our support for Ukraine must continue.

It also means doing more to increase Europe's ability to respond to any type of crisis and strategic autonomy. This requires a pressing need to develop a real common security and defence policy. One that complements NATO without competing with it.

In the current legislature, we already put some of the building blocks in place. We have worked together to ramp-up our capabilities, decrease duplications and reduce the fragmentation of the defence industries. Establishing a strong defence industrial base is the next step.

This of course ties into the discussion on European competitiveness, which is critical from an economic and a political perspective. Over the past years, we have seen a shift in the way global economic powers interact and trade with each other, in how they look at their own industries vis-a-vis Europe. It underscores the need to reinforce Europe's place on the global stage.

This does not mean fencing ourselves in. Our economy has grown stronger over the years precisely because we stood for the opposite. Open, balanced, fair trade that is based on international rules. Broadening our network of trade agreements with partners by concluding and ratifying the ones we have in the pipeline. We need to re-double our efforts.

Strengthening European competitiveness will also require deepening the Single Market, which will bring it back on par with the needs of the current context especially with the green and digital transitions of our economies. Only by increasing productivity, speeding-up investments in own industrial capabilities, can we reduce strategic dependencies while simultaneously supporting and sustaining economic growth.

The Single Market is our greatest economic driver and that needs to be reflected in levelling-up our communities. This is how we provide our citizens with hope that they can find suitable housing. How we address social inequalities, intergenerational poverty, and social exclusion still affecting our communities.

People require political and policy solutions from us - and these come at a cost. If we are to have the ability and the liquidity that is required to fund the solutions that are demanded of us by our citizens; if we are to grow our economies and pay back our debts, we have to get serious about finding innovative ways to fuel both public and private investment.

The first-ever increase of the ceilings in a mid-term revision of the EU's current long-term budget was an important step in the right direction, but we will soon enough be at the time where we need to prepare for the next MFF. Here we need to ensure a budget that is fit-for-purpose.

We also need to have a proper discussion about the fragmentation of our financial sector and more specifically obstacles to capital flows across our Union. Now I understand that this is not something new but it is certainly something newly pressing.

If we are serious about mobilising private capital to invest in our priorities, to incentivise our companies to stay in Europe, then we also need to complete our Banking and Capital Markets Unions. This is how we sustain economic growth and create new quality jobs and futures with dignities. We cannot allow ourselves, our citizens, to lose out.

People are worried about whether they can pay their bills. Whether they can keep their job or whether they will ever be able to afford to buy their own house. The electoral message here should serve as food for thought.

The responsibility lies on us to have the answers to those things with both ambition and understanding. Because the reality is that while our targets are world leading and this is something that we should - and we are - extremely proud of, burdens, bureaucracy and red-tape risk holding back progress.

Each regulation may well be justified but when taken together we need to be careful to ensure that this does not become too much. Our proposals must work for families. For industry. For farmers. When it comes to making progress on the green and digital transitions, no one should be left behind. Implementation here is key. That must be our focus now.

That is how we can bring Europe a little bit closer to how our people want it to be. How we can reflect on the message that the electorate sent us. How we will deliver on a stronger, safer, fairer and better Europe for all Europeans.

And a strong programme needs a strong team to take us forward. We cannot have one without the other.

I already briefed you last week about the European Parliament's next steps in the process of electing the next Commission President but to give you a quick update - since we last met, Charles Michel has attended the European Parliament's Conference of Presidents meeting for consultations with the political group leaders. The European Parliament remains firmly behind the Lead Candidate process and we confirm that the European People's Party is once again the largest political group in the European Parliament.

We will respect the due process and after you communicate to us the name from the European Council, we will invite the person to meet with Group leaders on Tuesday. The aim of this is to determine the candidate able to form the necessary qualified majority in Parliament to become the next Commission President. A candidate with a political programme that is able to capture the main electoral messages and reflect the views of the majority of the House.

Let me again assure you that my colleagues and I stand ready to move the smooth process forward for electing a new Commission President without delay as soon as the European Council submits its candidate and for the hearings of the Commissioners after that.

Thank you.