

Remarks by the President of the European Parliament
Roberta Metsola at the European Council
Brussels, 17th October 2024

Good morning.

The first European Council meeting I attended as President of the European Parliament was on the 24th of February 2022. Until that point, we might have comforted ourselves into believing that there were lines on the map that armies would no longer cross. But Russia's invasion of Ukraine on that infamous day changed everything. Now, we know there are lines in the sand that Europe cannot cross. It bears repeating, from us, now as war fatigue, Kremlin propaganda and disinformation keep bearing down relentlessly on our societies. Despite all this, Europeans have remained clear in why it is essential to stand with Ukraine. Europe's resolve remains strong and will remain strong.

It has been almost 1,000 days of aggression in Ukraine. A war that Ukrainians did not ask for, but one that they have met with extraordinary valour. Too many have been killed. Too much of Ukraine's critical infrastructure has been targeted and reduced to rubble. Too many children have not been able to return to their homes. Too many sons and daughters are readying for another winter on the front.

We will, and we must, keep standing with Ukraine - and equally we need to reinforce our efforts for peace. A peace that is rooted in freedom; that is anchored in dignity and that is built on justice. A peace that is not a capitulation. A peace that protects our values. Anything less than that is no real peace at all.

So when we talk about Ukraine's future and putting an end to this terrible war, we need to be clear: only a strong, sovereign Ukraine can achieve that. That is why the European Parliament stands firm in its conviction, why we have emphasised and will keep re-emphasising: nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine. It is also why we continue to support Moldova, the Western Balkans and Georgia's European paths and why we continue to call out, in no uncertain terms and through sanctions where needed, Russia's persistent attempts to destabilise the region.

So when President Zelenskyy speaks about what is needed for his people to sustain their defence, about the loopholes in our sanctions that still need to be closed, about the financial, logistic, military and humanitarian support that is needed to rebuild their towns and cities, then we must listen. And the European Parliament understands this.

That is why the first thing that we did at the start of this legislative term was adopt a resolution reaffirming our support. Three days ago, our Trade Committee voted to support Ukraine with an exceptional Macro-Financial Assistance loan of up to 35 billion Euros. Next week we will take a final vote in plenary. Politically and technically, we are proud to have done our work. And done it quickly.

My point is that for me and for the European Parliament, it was important to come here today to underscore a sense of urgency in our discussions and decisions and to underscore the importance of seeking solutions without compromising our values.

The same is true when it comes to our exchanges on the Middle East.

Last week in Strasbourg, we marked one year since the 7th October terrorist attacks by Hamas in Israel. There is nothing that could ever justify what happened on that day. One year later, the wounds are still deep and too few hostages were able to make it back to their loved ones.

The 7th October attacks triggered a cycle of war, death and devastation that has seen thousands killed in Gaza. Too many children will never grow old. Too many now know war.

It is a horrific humanitarian catastrophe and we must step up our efforts to alleviate the suffering there or risk another lost generation.

The situation has only been made worse with the disrupting and destabilising efforts of Iran, a regime that has long sown the seeds of division across the region.

Alongside the recent escalation in Lebanon, including now involving the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon, it is more critical than ever to find a sustainable solution and to do so urgently.

Europe has a role to play here and we cannot be found wanting.

The European Parliament's position is clear. Our calls for the immediate release of the remaining hostages will remain steadfast. Our calls for a ceasefire will remain resolute. Our efforts towards de-escalation will remain strong. And our work for a real, dignified, sustainable, long-term peace in the region, based on two States that gives real perspective to Palestinians and security to Israel, will remain unwavering.

Because in times like these, it is not just about calling for peace - it is about taking real, concrete steps towards de-escalation. The same is true when it comes to Sudan. Right now, Sudan is at the heart of the largest displacement crisis in the world, with hunger levels soaring to unprecedented heights. The path to peace there is through constructive dialogue, and only through this engagement can we hope to achieve a sustainable ceasefire.

We cannot ignore the ripple effects of instability. What happens in Eastern Europe, in the Middle East, in Northern Africa or anywhere else near our borders, does not just stay isolated - it has consequences for Europe. Nowhere is this more visible than in the area of migration.

We need to go beyond quick fixes. This is a European issue that requires a European approach. No Member State should feel that they are being left alone to deal with these pressures.

The EU Migration and Asylum Pact, which we adopted earlier this year after a decade of political impasse, offers a pathway forward. But it will not work if, in moments of pressure, we undermine what we have built together. If it is not allowed to be implemented.

That is why it is important that we scale-up efforts to swiftly implement the Pact. That is the answer we can give to our communities coming under pressure.

Our commonly agreed-to framework that protects our borders, but that is also fair with those eligible for protection, that is firm with those not eligible and who must be safely and swiftly returned, and that - critically - is harsh against the trafficking networks, including malign States like Russia and Belarus using hybrid threats, preying on the vulnerable and weaponising migration.

The nature of these hybrid threats require us to think outside the box. We must respond to those actors who seek to abuse the systems we built for the betterment of man, against the very humanity they are meant to protect. And we can do so within the parameters of our values and legal frameworks.

Which is why we also need to urgently step up the return of failed asylum seekers who can be safely and swiftly returned. That is how we are able to dedicate resources to those who really need it. That is how we alleviate societal and political pressure facing us all.

The European Parliament is prepared to do whatever it can to assist you in this process. We need to give the EU Migration Pact a chance - to implement it, even complement it where necessary. The Parliament has already taken note of President von der Leyen's letter as a good start for our discussions. We also know that additional proposals may come from the Commission and we are willing and ready to play our part.

The key here is cooperation. The real solution is a European solution - one that is broad, that is holistic, and that is sustainable. Because only a coordinated European approach can ensure the integrity of our Schengen area.

I am sure that these issues will all be a central part of the European Parliament's scrutiny process for the new Commissioner Designates that have started in earnest with the first hearings starting on the 4th of November.

The Parliament will do its job, we will take the process extremely seriously and I hope that we will be in a position to approve a new College to take its seat by the beginning of December.

Thank you.