

A NEW VITALITY FOR EUROPE

Honourable Members,

If Europe is to play this vital role in the world – it must also create a new vitality internally.

And to move forward we must now overcome the differences that have held us back.

The historic agreement on NextGenerationEU shows that it can be done. The speed with which we took decisions on fiscal rules, state aid or for SURE – all this shows it can be done.

So let's do it.

Migration is an issue that has been discussed long enough.

Migration has always been a fact for Europe – and it will always be. Throughout centuries, it has defined our societies, enriched our cultures and shaped many of our lives. And this will always be the case.

As we all know, the 2015 migration crisis caused many deep divisions between Member States – with some of those scars still healing today.

A lot has been done since. But a lot is still missing.

If we are all ready to make compromises – without compromising on our principles – we can find that solution.

Next week, the Commission will put forward its New Pact on Migration.

We will take a **human and humane approach**. Saving lives at sea is not optional. And those countries who fulfil their legal and moral duties or are more exposed than others, must be able to rely on the solidarity of our whole European Union.

We will ensure a closer link between asylum and return. We have to make a clear distinction between those who have the right to stay and those who do not.

We will take action to fight smugglers, strengthen external borders, deepen external partnerships and create legal pathways.

And we will make sure that people who have the right to stay are integrated and made to feel welcome.

They have a future to build – and skills, energy and talent.

I think of Suadd, the teenage Syrian refugee who arrived in Europe dreaming of being a doctor. Within three years she was awarded a prestigious scholarship from the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.

I think of the Libyan and Somalian refugee doctors who offered their medical skills the moment the pandemic struck in France.

Honourable Members, if we think about what they have overcome and what they have achieved, then we **simply must be able to manage the question of migration together**.

The images of the Moria camp are a painful reminder of the need for Europe to come together.

Everybody has to step up here and take responsibility – and the Commission will do just that. The Commission is now working on a plan for a joint pilot with the Greek authorities for a new camp on Lesbos. We can assist with asylum and return processes and significantly improve the conditions for the refugees.

But I want to be clear: if we step up, then I expect all Member States to step up too.

Migration is a European challenge and all of Europe must do its part.

We must rebuild the trust amongst us and move forward together.

And this trust is at the very heart of our Union and the way we do things together.

It is anchored in our founding values, our democracies and in our Community of Law – as Walter Hallstein used to call it.

This is not an abstract term. The rule of law helps protect people from the rule of the powerful. It is the guarantor of our most basic of every day rights and freedoms. It allows us to give our opinion

and be informed by a free press.

Before the end of the month, the Commission will adopt the first annual rule of law report covering all Member States.

It is a preventive tool for early detection of challenges and for finding solutions.

I want this to be a starting point for Commission, Parliament and Member States to ensure there is no backsliding.

The Commission attaches the highest importance to the rule of law. This is why we will ensure that money from our budget and NextGenerationEU is protected against any kind of fraud, corruption and conflict of interest. This is non-negotiable.

But the last months have also reminded us how fragile it can be. We have a duty to always be vigilant to care and nurture for the rule of law.

Breaches of the rule of law cannot be tolerated. I will continue to defend it and the integrity of our European institutions. Be it about the primacy of European law, the freedom of the press, the independence of the judiciary or the sale of golden passports. European values are not for sale.

Honourable Members,

These values are more important than ever. I say that because when I think about the state of our Union, I am reminded of the words of John Hume – one of the great Europeans who sadly passed away this year.

If so many people live in peace today on the island of Ireland, it is in large part because of his unwavering belief in humanity and conflict resolution.

He used to say that conflict was about difference and that peace was about *respect* for difference.

And as he so rightly reminded this House in 1998: "*The European visionaries decided that difference is not a threat, difference is natural. **Difference is the essence of humanity***".

These words are just as important today as they ever have been.

Because when we look around, we ask ourselves, *where is the essence of humanity* when three children in Wisconsin watch their father shot by police while they sit in the car?

We ask *where is the essence of humanity* when anti-semitic carnival costumes openly parade on our streets?

Where is the essence of humanity when every single day Roma people are excluded from society and others are held back simply because of the colour of their skin or their religious belief?

I am proud to live in Europe, in this open society of values and diversity.

But even here in this Union – these stories are a daily reality for so many people.

And this reminds us that **progress on fighting racism and hate is fragile – it is hard won but very easily lost.**

So now is the moment to make change.

To build a truly anti-racist Union – that goes from condemnation to action.

And the Commission is putting forward an action plan to start making that happen.

As part of this, we will propose to extend the list of EU crimes to all forms of hate crime and hate speech – whether because of race, religion, gender or sexuality.

Hate is hate – and no one should have to put up with it.

We will strengthen our racial equality laws where there are gaps.

We will use our budget to address discrimination in areas such as employment, housing or healthcare.

We will get tougher on enforcement when implementation lags behind.

Because in this Union, fighting racism will never be optional.

We will **improve education and knowledge** on the historical, cultural causes of racism.