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## Adenauer Stiftung Speech

– *President Charles Michel* –

9 November 2021

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Dear President Lammert,  
President Tzitzikostas,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear friends,

Thank you for your warm welcome.

I am deeply touched to speak to you, here in Berlin, on such an important date – the 9th of November.

As a fervent European, there is probably no better date ... nor place ... to talk about the future of Europe.

Because it links, by chance of the **calendar**, two **events** that were the seeds of the most **atrocious tragedy** of our **continent** ... and a few **decades** later ... the **symbolic** event that marked the beginning of our **unification**.

The Europe of 27 is the **product** of a unique reconciliation ... after a unique tragedy. And Berlin, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November, is its symbolic capital.

But Europe is not just about **symbols**.

Europe is the result of decades of hard work by many. They were not **intimidated** by the distance between their starting point ... and their almost **utopian** ideal.

Konrad Adenauer was one of them.

Discussing the future of Europe under his watchful eye ... calls for high standards and **modesty**.

I thank you for giving me this **prestigious** opportunity.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

The 21st century will be the century of Europe.

This may sound **presumptuous** ... I know. Europe, like the rest of the world, faces enormous challenges.

Climate change ... saving the planet, and humanity, from natural disaster. This will **require** a radical **transformation** of our **development paradigm**.

The digital **revolution** ... and managing the boom of **artificial intelligence**.

And in addition, Covid-19 ... a long-predicted pandemic ... for which we were not prepared.

Finally, we face the growing pressure of **authoritarian** regimes. They provoke new tensions ... and undermine our **democracies**.

Science and facts are increasingly questioned.

We are not unique. Every generation faces a unique set of seemingly insurmountable challenges.

But it's not an exaggeration ... to say that today's challenges are the most complex ... since the aftermath of the last World War.

And we all feel our collective historic responsibility. I am convinced that the EU has the strength to tackle these challenges.

*[Europe ... admired in the world]*

Of course, in Europe, we often hear pessimistic or defeatist accounts of Europe. That we are too weak, too helpless to face the dangers of these uncertain times.

Some parties even use people's anxieties as the springboard for their ambitions.

I have a different experience.

When I meet leaders, NGO activists, or people around the world, they almost always speak with admiration about our European Union.

I recently took part in the summit of Latin American and Caribbean countries, in Mexico. When speaking with leaders there, I felt the strong, magnetic attraction that the European Union holds for them.

So what exactly do they see in us?

They see a great power.

They see the largest **area** of **democracy** and freedom in the world.  
The most advanced area of prosperity and social **development**.

They see a unique example of continental integration: peaceful and **voluntary**.

*[A successful player]*

This admiration is not an **abstract** projection. It can be explained by our concrete **successes**.

Our single currency, the euro, has become the second most traded currency in the world.

Our area of free movement offers benefits that we only fully appreciated when the pandemic limited them.

And our successes have a direct impact on the rest of the world. For the better.

The European Union has led the fight against global warming for years. Notably in 2019, when we were the first to commit to climate neutrality by 2050. And others have followed.

And when Covid-19 struck, despite some initial hesitations, we reacted quickly and decisively. With solidarity.

We agreed on the most ambitious investment and recovery package ever decided by the European Union. And this ... from very different starting points.

Here I would like to pay tribute to Germany.

You have played a leading role in moving the lines on common European investments. And financing a recovery that benefits our entire European single market.

On vaccines, the European Union was at the forefront of global **fundraising**.

And we grounded our strategy in solidarity.

Right from the start, we decided to jointly **purchase** vaccines for all 27 Member States. This ensured their fair **distribution** across our Union.

Back in March, on the topic of vaccines, we knew the EU was not running a sprint, but a marathon. And indeed, the EU has become the world's largest producer and exporter of Covid vaccines.

And when it comes to global vaccine solidarity, the EU is at the head of the pack.

We helped launch the COVAX facility – for the equitable distribution of vaccines across the world. We are its first sponsor.

We have launched programmes to develop mRNA vaccine production capacity in Africa. And we are prepared to do this elsewhere...

The EU has done all this, despite having almost no competence in health in the EU treaties. We did it ... because the 27 Member States wanted us to. And we did it ... without organising a convention ... or changing the treaties.

These successes ... and the image we project across the world ... reinforce my deep conviction – that our unique European model will allow us to tackle this century’s greatest challenges head-on...

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

I believe Europe is **destined** to become the great “power of peace” for this 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A **positive, unifying** power...

We can fulfil this **destiny** ... if we achieve the two conditions perfectly summarised by someone dear to you ... and very dear to me .... Angela Merkel.



When she received the Charles the Fifth prize recently, in Madrid, she said:

"Europe can only be as strong as it is united. And it can only be as united as it is bound together by common values. United internally ... and strong externally."

Unity and strength ... along with our "strategic autonomy" ... are the keys to the future of Europe.

*[First, unity]*

First, unity. Where else knows better than Germany that **unity** – **unification** – makes you stronger?

But as you know, unity does not appear from the **Heavens**. It takes work. It must be built. Step by step ... day by day ... year after year.

And for unity to work in a Union of 27, it takes two key **ingredients** – mutual understanding and trust.

Our countries and regions have **diverse** histories, languages, traditions, political and economic backgrounds.

It is precisely this **diversity** that makes Europe **extraordinarily** rich. But it also makes our quest for unity particularly challenging.

So we must strive to understand each other ... and respect our differences.

This means **recognising** the equal **legitimacy** of each part of our Union. There should be no talk of "small" and "large" Member States. Of centre and **periphery**. Of old and new.

Nor should we speak of nations that have “understood” the European spirit better than others.

This **poisons** our unity. And wreaks of **condescension**.

No place knows this better than this city – Berlin. Where the physical fall of the Wall ... led to the slow dismantling of mental walls.

Yet elsewhere, we sometimes hear words ... that make some EU countries feel like victims of double **standards**.

This cannot happen. There is no place for double standards ... in one Union.

For unity to survive and flourish, it needs a solid **foundation**. Our common values. Human dignity and freedom. **Solidarity** and **tolerance**. Respect for **diversity**.

It also requires ... trust. Which grows and takes shape in a set of commonly chosen and accepted rules. And patience.

**Dear friends,**

Unity is not **chiseled** in stone ... once and for all. It's a process ... a collective journey.

You start with different interests and different points of view. You discuss. You listen actively. You work to bring them closer together. You identify common interests. You compromise ... for the common good. The good of all.

I often see the headlines before our European Council meetings. They denounce the divisions ... as if different opinions ... and different national interests ... were a betrayal of our Union.

I don't see it like that.

Democratic debate means coming together, looking each other in the eye, sometimes debating **vigourously** .... and deciding.

This is how **democracy** works...

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Unity also requires ownership.

In **authoritarian** systems, ownership is imposed. In **democratic** systems, it is **debated** ... then acquired. This leads to **democratic legitimacy**.

In Brussels, you will sometimes hear the line:

"The European Union would be an absolutely amazing invention ... **un**fortunately, it is full of Member States..."

This implies that Member States are somehow selfish ... an **obstacle** to achieving our "European **ideal**".

Nothing could be further from the truth.

**My dear friends,**

The European Union is based on a double democratic **legitimacy**.

On the one hand, the **legitimacy** of the Member States. Where parliaments are elected and appoint governments. They represent their countries in the Council ...

And on the other hand, the **legitimacy** of the directly elected European Parliament. The designation of the European Commission reflects this double **democratic legitimacy**.

EU action is only possible when it is based on these two democratic pillars... One is not more **legitimately** European ... than the other.

This **legitimacy** is guaranteed by the rule of law.

The rule of law means the separation of powers. And the mutual independence of these powers. In particular, the independence of the **judiciary** – the essential condition for **confidence** in the system.

*[Strategic autonomy]*

**Dear friends,**

The other key to Europe's future ... is our **strategic autonomy**.

This term is understood **differently** in different places. And with different **sensibilities**.

What matters most ... is not the term, but the meaning behind it...  
Our goals...

In my view, **strategic autonomy** means ... no more and no less ... than being master of our own **destiny**. The ability to act together ... in an open world.

It means **managing** our interdependencies ... while avoiding excessive dependencies.

To reinforce our **strategic autonomy**, we must strengthen our prosperity, our single market ... and bolster our security.

### **[Prosperity]**

Our prosperity is anchored in a competitive market of 450 million inhabitants – offering **infinite** scope for freedom of creation, enterprise, and exchange.

We still need to **perfect** its framework. To complete the banking union, and to achieve a true capital markets union to better channel money to the real economy.

And we will soon have to discuss if our Stability and Growth Pact ... that has served us well for 24 years ... needs to be updated.

Ludwig Erhard always reminded Germany that "the focal point of our **economy** is the **individual**..."

Our European vision is one of shared prosperity. Where all citizens enjoy the same opportunities ... and the same range of **products** and services.

This is the meaning of our cohesion policies ... and of our Recovery programme – Next Generation EU – which aim to reduce the gaps, between countries and regions...

The more our **economies** converge, the stronger they will be for each other.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

The European Union has a clear and robust strategy to face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

A strategy underpinned by our twin transitions ... of climate and digital. They are **enshrined** in our Green Deal ... And in our Digital Agenda.



This transition implies a massive transformation of our economic and social paradigm...

Today's climate emergency leaves us no choice...

We must pursue a totally new development model – one that no longer abuses natural resources ... but re-uses them in a circular economy ... detached from fossil fuels.

This transition will require profound changes in behaviour. And it offers extraordinary potential – to innovate ... and to create new technologies and services that will drive our prosperity.

The digital revolution will play a **pivotal** role.

Maximising the vast potential of data ... and artificial intelligence ... will be **decisive** to our future success.

This future sparks excitement in some ... and anxiety in others.

Many people wonder what will become of their jobs. Or worry about their children's **prospects**. This uncertainty is **understandable**.

Ten or twenty years from now ... some of you will be working in jobs that don't yet exist today. This is hard to imagine.

So ... we must be forward-looking ... and provide the right training for these new professions. Because we will crucially need skilled workers. And because we want everyone to be part of this exciting future.

*[Trade]*

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Prosperity comes from our internal market. It also comes from external trade. Trade drives development. And trade is a powerful lever to influence the world.

The European Union is the world's leading trading power.

But we have a problem. We are very good at striking ambitious free trade or investment agreements with foreign partners ... with the European Commission in charge.

But for some time now, we have difficulty **ratifying** these agreements once they are signed. We can only implement them provisionally ... at best.

The problem is one of form ... and one of substance.

On the form ... the confidentiality of these negotiations makes it increasingly difficult to explain their value ... to the public ... and to the national parliaments that must approve them.

In other words: ownership does not work.

We should take **inspiration** from the more **transparent** and **inclusive method** taken in the Brexit negotiations.

As for the substance ... we need to clarify the goals and priorities of these agreements. We started this discussion among leaders at our last European Council.

Do we believe they should facilitate trade and investment ... within a framework of reciprocity and level playing field ... while also contributing to a fairer, more sustainable world?

Or do we think an agreement is only valid and acceptable ... if it solves all the world's problems in one go?

I'll give you an example. The Commission negotiated a Comprehensive agreement on investments with China. This agreement would open access to major sectors from which our European companies are currently barred. It would create more reciprocity. And address labour laws and conditions.

Is this agreement perfect? No.

Did we get everything we wanted? Certainly not.

But neither did China.

Would this agreement lead to a democratic system in China ... and full respect for human and labour rights? No.

But it creates a platform to discuss these issues with the Chinese authorities ... who don't like them ... because they do not share our same system and our values.

The question is ... are our interests better defended ... and our ability to protect the Uighurs' rights ... and to promote the rule of law in Hong Kong better ensured ... with, or without, such an agreement?

This is not an exact science. There is no easy answer.

So we need to agree – at the level of the Member States and the EU institutions - on the priorities we pursue with these agreements.

And in any case, I agree with my friend Mark Rutte, Prime minister of the Netherlands, when he says: "Europe must be a player. Not a playing field."

I will make sure the European Council addresses this important debate.

*[Global capacity and security]*

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

The second pillar of our strategic autonomy ... is security.

It begins with our “soft” geopolitical influence – aimed at promoting our values and defending our interests.

Here, I believe we have a powerful advantage ... *[and I will tell you a secret...]* The world wants to engage with us.

Because our partners see the benefit of engaging with a positive force. Free from the colonial prisms of the past centuries.

We are building new alliances – with Africa, Asia, and Latin America – with partners who are confident about our vision ... and about our values.

These alliances are about interconnecting our physical and digital infrastructure. And about connecting our people. By **stimulating** public and private investment – within a framework of rules and **standards** that put fundamental values at the heart of projects.

This is what we call ... 'trusted **connectivity**'. And we want to develop this trusted **connectivity** with like-minded partners.

Moreover, global issues can only be addressed through global cooperation. The best way to exert influence is to be present **diplomatically**. To engage.

Ensuring our security means knowing and better understanding our neighbours, our competitors, even our adversaries. And making ourselves better understood by them.

That is what I try to do, for instance, in my phone calls with the Russian President. It gives me the knowledge to share with my colleagues in the European Council... Or with other international partners ... like the **Ukrainian** President.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Diplomacy also means taking advantage of opportunities.

When I visited Georgia last spring ... a strategically important country in the framework of our Eastern Partnership ... I saw the opportunity to broker a political deal between the conflicted parties.

Similarly, after my contacts with the Armenian and Azeri leaders, the EU managed to broker a post-conflict deal between these countries.

The EU has a role to play. An important role.

And allow me to take aim at an over-used cliché. It says that ... without our own defence, the European Union lacks the instruments to assume our role as a global power.

We have many instruments – often unsuspected – to influence external actors.



We could be much stronger and more efficient, by being more pragmatic ... and more coherent.

There are many examples of pragmatic European responses to crisis situations.

But we need to be more coherent. EU policies ... trade, development, competition, neighbourhood, climate action – are often managed “in silos” ... independent of each other.

This is precisely ... what the European Council does: linking different policies..., ensuring coherence. Requesting the Commission to organise ... on the external dimension of migration. We strive for a mutually beneficial cooperation with third countries. We have a lot to offer them ...

This topic brings me to a current crisis.

We are facing a brutal, hybrid attack on our EU borders. Belarus is weaponising migrants' distress in a cynical and shocking way.

At our last European Council, we condemned ... and decided to respond ... to these attacks. We asked the Commission to propose all necessary measures in line with EU law, international obligations, and fundamental rights.

We have opened the debate on the EU financing of physical border infrastructure. This must be settled rapidly.

Polish and Baltic borders are EU borders. One for all ... and all for one.

*[Defence]*

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Security also means ... defence.

European defence is **anchored** in our Atlantic alliance. NATO is the backbone of our collective security.

Beyond the military, this **alliance** links us to our strategic partners on the other side of the Atlantic. We share a common history, values, and commitments.

This **alliance** of **democracies** is all the more essential at a time of increasing pressure – as we face new kinds of attack, from **authoritarian** regimes.

This is why we must develop our defence capabilities ... stronger **allies** make stronger **alliances**.

And we welcome the United States' recognition of the value of a stronger European defence ... as a complement to NATO.

Yet, we cannot ignore the long-term developments ... even among our allies.

Recent geopolitical events in **Afghanistan** ... and the **Indo-Pacific** ... have shown that we must rely more on ourselves. Take greater responsibility for ourselves.

Overdependence ... even on our best friends ... is not sustainable.

In concrete terms, the European Council has agreed on a work plan for the near future.

In December, we will discuss the "strategic **compass**" being prepared by our High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell.

This **compass** will set out our strategic axes. We will endorse it ... at a defence summit in March.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

We are often asked the question ... will Europe, one day, have its own European army?

The **prospect** exists. But in any case ... we all know ... it wouldn't be for tomorrow.

Today, more than a European army, we need European capabilities.

Yet, I do believe we must act in a concrete and operational way ... to develop our capabilities in the face of new risks ... and in new areas ... cyber ... and space.

Digital development is making our economies ... and our societies more efficient. But also more dependent on technology, databases, and connectivity.

One thing is certain: we will one day have to face a major cyber-crisis or cyber-attack. The only question is ... when?

Recent attacks have shown that the threats are global. And so are the **attackers**. It is therefore in the interest of Europeans to pool our efforts and create defensive – and deterrent ... cyber **capabilities**.

This should start by establishing an EU system for cyber crisis management ... and response ... to large-scale attacks. Our upcoming discussion on our "strategic **compass**" will be an opportunity to consider this project.

Our cyber security is also **intrinsically** linked to the security of our resources in space.

We are familiar with geolocation, observation, and surveillance tools ... on land and at sea. But space is increasingly hosting infrastructure and services that provide connectivity functions ... essential to digital development.

The congestion of this territory – not to mention the activities of **malicious** actors – mean that we must also protect our interests there.

So we must strengthen the **synergies** between the civil, space and defence industries. Last April, we adopted the new European Union Space Programme – with a **record** budget of 13 billion euro.

We will make a difference by pooling our efforts from the outset.

**Dear friends,**

Konrad Adenauer – who else – famously said:

""We should not forget that to achieve great things, we need patience.""

I would add this: some victories come after a long time, while others can be reached swiftly.

The European project takes time... 70 years is still a young age for such a unique organisation like ours. And we have already achieved a lot!

Our experience shows that sometimes we can gain time ... by taking our time.

And in other moments, it's good to be pragmatic, and speed up.

I have no doubt the EU is on the right track – to become the great power of peace of the 21st century ... the century of Europe.

For the benefit of our people, and for a better, fairer and more sustainable world.

We must be wise ... know when to be patient. And when to seize the moment ... to take decisive action.

We will stick to our values ... and to our **ideals**.

And we will grow in power ... by being pragmatic ... by being realistic ... and by being ambitious.

Thank you.