

# 'This is Europe' debate in the European Parliament: Speech by Petteri Orpo, Prime Minister of Finland, 13 March 2024

'This is Europe' – an initiative proposed by the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola – consists of a series of debates with EU leaders to discuss their visions for the future of the European Union. The trilogy of resilience, competitiveness and security was at the centre of the vision of Europe that the Prime Minister of Finland, Petteri Orpo, shared with the European Parliament on 13 March 2024. Regarding competitiveness, he mentioned the single market, State aid, trade and economic governance. On security, he argued that the concept not only included security and defence, but also border protection and preparedness to make the EU more resilient. Orpo also emphasised that, for Finland, 'the EU is the most important political and economic frame of reference and community of values', and stressed that EU leaders had to 'fight against any pessimism and show an example and leadership'.

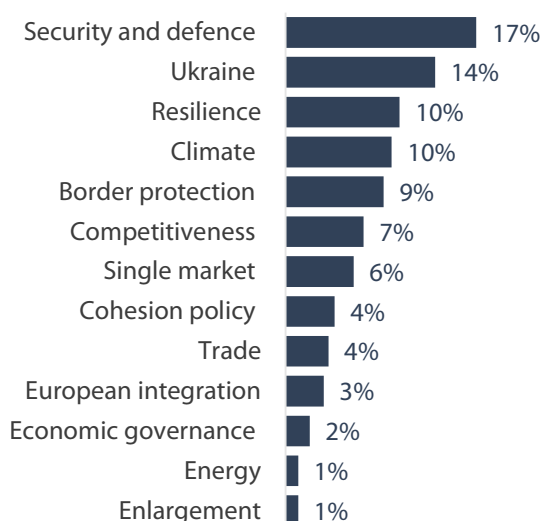
*We now find ourselves at a key moment in history, one that calls for our courage, unity, and determination.*

Petteri Orpo

## Background

Roberta Metsola launched the 'This is Europe' initiative shortly after her election as President of the European Parliament in January 2022. Petteri Orpo is the 13th EU leader to have addressed the Parliament since its Conference of Presidents endorsed the initiative on 28 April 2022.<sup>1</sup> A similar Parliament initiative, ahead of the 2019 European elections, saw 20 EU leaders speak in Parliament's plenary sessions about their views on the future of Europe. A 2019 EPRS [analysis](#) of the future of Europe debates pinpointed the similarities and differences in EU leaders' views.

Figure 1 – Time devoted by Petteri Orpo to various topics in his speech



Source: EPRS.

The 'This is Europe' initiative is particularly relevant in the context of the follow-up to the Conference on the Future of Europe ([CoFoE](#)), and the preparations for the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029. The CoFoE produced 49 proposals on the EU's future policies and functioning (see the EPRS [overview](#)), including more than 300 measures by which they might be achieved. [Research](#) by EPRS has shown that there is significant convergence between the results of the CoFoE and the priorities of the European Council, as expressed in the latter's [Strategic Agenda](#) 2019-2024 and its conclusions.

On the [initiative](#) of European Council President Charles Michel, EU leaders have started the reflection process on the priorities for the next institutional cycle, which will lead to the Strategic Agenda 2024-2029. The first step in the reflection process was a [discussion](#) at the informal European Council meeting in Granada

<sup>1</sup> An earlier speech to the Parliament in this context by Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas took place before this endorsement.



on [5-6 October 2023](#). The second step entailed a [series of meetings](#), each with a small number of EU leaders representing a mix of geographical regions in the EU, political party affiliations and diversity of opinion. Four meetings have taken place to date, on [13 November](#) in Berlin, [14 November](#) in Copenhagen, [16 November](#) in Zagreb, and [29 November](#) in Paris. Another series of small group meetings will take place in early April, ahead of the [special European Council meeting](#) on 17-18 April.

## Main focus of Petteri Orpo's speech

Orpo covered a number of topics in his [speech](#) to Parliament (see Figure 1), devoting most attention to i) security and defence, ii) the war in Ukraine, iii) EU resilience, and iv) climate.

### Security and defence

In Orpo's view, 'we are living in a time where practically all policy fields are linked to our security, and without security, we cannot ensure a prosperous future for Europe'. Security and defence is an important pillar of 'European comprehensive security', and the Finnish Prime Minister sees the strengthening of the EU's defence industry as 'priority number one'. He called on Member States to pool their resources.

### War in Ukraine

Prime Minister Orpo stressed that the war in Ukraine threatened the very principles on which the European Union was built. He reiterated that agreeing unanimously on the EU's Ukraine Facility had been crucial, and called on Member States to strengthen the support for Ukraine so that it can win this war, while at the same time enhancing the EU's own defence capabilities. The next step is to deliver swiftly on ammunition production and to agree on additional funding for the European Peace Facility and Ukraine Assistance Fund.

### EU resilience

For Orpo, the EU and its Member States must be better prepared for a growing number of increasingly complex crises. Therefore, he proposed that the Commission should develop an EU strategy for a 'Preparedness Union'. This strategy should be based on a whole-of-society approach, in which the needs and contributions of all policy sectors are taken into account.

### Climate

Orpo stressed that the EU should combat climate change and support biodiversity in a way that acknowledges the diverse circumstances across the Member States. In his view, a technology-neutral, cost-effective clean transition will pave the way for sustainable growth. He called for the EU's climate policy to be recalibrated in the next institutional cycle, moving away from overly detailed regulation to fostering innovation.

## Specific proposals and positions

Prime Minister Orpo used the opportunity to present his [views](#) on how the European Union should advance in specific areas, summarised below.

Table 1 – Specific proposals made by Petteri Orpo, by policy area

| Policy issue                   | Priority action and proposals (quotes)  |
|--------------------------------|---|
| <b>Economic governance</b>     | 'We must also utilise existing instruments more effectively. This means reforming the next MFF and seeking more financial resources from the markets, for example through the EIB and by developing the Capital Markets Union.' |
| <b>State aid</b>               | 'It is crucial that we restore the normal State aid rules. A healthy single market benefits all European citizens and businesses – today and in the long term.'   |
| <b>Trade policy</b>            | 'If we want to be globally relevant, we need a better ability to conclude, ratify and implement trade deals, not a better ability to bring them down.'  |
| <b>Competitiveness</b>         | 'We must build our competitiveness by developing our strengths, and through market-based solutions, with a fully functioning internal market at the core.'  |
| <b>Innovation and research</b> | 'We must foster innovation and skills, strengthen our internal market, and ensure significant funding for innovation and research.'   |