

**Europe and the United States in a new world**  
*Address by the President of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola*  
*at the Johns Hopkins University, in Washington D.C.*  
*Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> February 2025*

Good morning everyone and thank you for that warm welcome.

It is an honour to be here at Johns Hopkins University - an institution that has shaped some of the brightest minds of our time. A place built on the belief that knowledge, diplomacy and service are not just ideals, but forces that can change the world. And when we talk about the pursuit for a better world - peaceful, free, safe and just - one of those minds put it best. She said: "This job of international leadership is not the kind of assignment one ever finishes. Old dangers rarely go away completely, and new ones appear as regularly as dawn. Dealing with them effectively has never been a matter of just money and might. Countries and people must join forces, and that doesn't happen naturally."

That was Madeleine Albright. One of your own. A woman who understood that true strength does not come from looking inward, but from standing up for something greater. That isolation may look safe - until it leaves you stranded.

She spoke from experience. And that is precisely why she stood for a world where nations are able to come together, work together, and move forward together too. A world where peace, freedom, and justice were not simply ideals but shared responsibilities. Today, that order is again being tested. And when people look to Europe and to the United States for leadership - against those who believe in 'might being the only right', those who seek to chip away at everything we have built - we would be historically wrong to turn away.

The world relies on the strength of the transatlantic relationship. It is beyond shared trade, commerce and industry. It is beyond immediate political considerations. It is about what we collectively represent to people everywhere.

People under pressure from autocrats look to us for support. People under attack for their beliefs and their views across the globe look to our flags as symbols of liberty. People under fire on the front line are fighting for the way of life our two blocs represent.

This partnership matters.

Our bond goes back centuries. From Locke's concept of natural rights, to Montesquieu's idea of separation of powers, European thinkers inspired the principles at the very basis of your nation. And in return, America's bold experiment in democracy became a beacon of hope that inspired revolutions and movements for liberty across Europe.

Like the United States Constitution enshrines the rights of its people, so do the European Union's constitutive laws. Like you, we believe in the dignity of every human being. That every person should have equal opportunity to reach their full potential. Like you, we believe in justice. In the right to feel safe and live in safety. Like you, we believe in freedom – individual liberty, free trade, freedom to disagree and the cornerstone of everything: freedom of speech. In that age-old principle that we may not like what some people say, we may be offended by what is being said, but we will always, always, defend your right to say it. I want

to be emphatic: Europe has never and will never retreat from that. Because like you, Europeans weren't just handed those rights. They were fought for. Defended, at unimaginable cost.

I was only a young child when I watched, on a very grainy TV screen in our living room, as people, young and old, desperately tore down the Berlin Wall. When Lithuanians stood in front of Soviet tanks to defend their freedom. When the Polish Solidarność movement defied the odds and brought a regime to its knees. I may not have grasped the full weight of those moments, but I remember the feeling. That unshakable, unstoppable, unbridled surge of hope. The sheer joy of so many millions of people finally free to determine their own destinies. The stories of America and Europe are written in the sacrifices of those who gave everything to secure freedom over tyranny.

Yesterday I was in Arlington. Last December, I attended the commemoration of the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge alongside surviving US veterans who fought the bitter cold and snow, who bled on one of the deadliest battlefields during World War II - not because it was easy, not because it was convenient. But because they understood that the fight for freedom is never just the fight of one nation. That it is the responsibility of all who believe in the greater good.

That is why together we set-up the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, a partnership to bind our continents in defence of freedom. Last year, NATO celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary right here in Washington D.C. That makes our transatlantic relationship the most successful alliance in history.

I am proud to be European. I am proud to lead a Parliament that flies the flag for our way of life. I make no apologies for that.

Sure, there are areas where we can do better. Increasing defence spending is one of them. Since 2021, EU Member States have already increased their defence budgets by 31%. And yet, we know that we need to do more. That we need to go even further. And we will. We must. We will put our money where our mouth is, even if that means taking the painful decisions we know are necessary. We know that our commitment needs to match the level of threat we are facing. And that threat is very high.

Simplifying - not complicating - our systems and our voters' lives is another issue at the very top of our political agenda. In the world's largest multi-national democratic exercise that was held last June, too many Europeans went to the polling booths out of a sense of frustration and desperation. Perhaps the situation is not so dissimilar on this side of the Atlantic.

I am, by nature, an optimist - but I think a degree of self-critical analysis, of listening and changing course when needed, is important. It is how we can prove that our values aren't just words written in old manuscripts or archaic laws. But that it is precisely because of them that we are able to make people's lives tangibly better and safer. It is because we believe in these values that we can work to find solutions to make it easier for companies to do business with and within Europe. In my time here, I have been meeting with European industry leaders that have massive operations in the US. My message to them? Europe has your back. I have also been meeting with US companies to explain Europe's future-driven approach. We are open for business. Because in our process of regeneration, I consider this an opportunity for us both.

Some people may see Europe as a museum. They are wrong. Ours is the continent that sparked the industrial revolution, the very engine that helped transform America's economy. It was men and women of German, Italian, Irish and Polish descent who rolled up their sleeves and laid the foundation for generations of American prosperity. Even Lady Liberty herself was forged out of European steel.

Europe is predictable. Reliable - boring even. In geopolitics boring is not a bad thing. Do not underestimate the value of boring. Do not underestimate Europe's unity, resolve, strength and willingness to act.

And Europe is not just a story of the past. It is BMW, Volkswagen, Airbus, Lufthansa, and Mercedes-Benz changing the way the world moves. It is Louis Vuitton, Ferrari, Hermes, Gucci, proving that European quality never goes out of style. It is Ericsson, Siemens, SAP, Spotify, Mistral, inventing, innovating and pushing boundaries. Employing thousands of people on this side of the Atlantic too.

We are proud of our European success stories. That is why our global economic philosophy has always been to support free, open and fair trade with our allies. Now that does not mean that we are always going to have the same interests. But this does not have to be a permanent back and forth. We can find a way for us all to win. That is always preferable to everyone losing – when it would be only those on the axis of autocracies who benefit from trade wars.

That's why I think we should be talking about trade agreements rather than tariffs. Pulling ourselves up together rather than the opposite. We are not out to screw anyone. And this win-win attitude will always be our preferred approach. Of course, at the same time, we are very ready for anything.

So allow me to be clear: The EU will react firmly and immediately against unjustified barriers to free and fair trade, including when tariffs are used to challenge legal and non-discriminatory policies. We don't want to go down that road, but we are ready.

As President of the European Parliament, I preside over a House made up of 720 Members across 27 countries, spread into 8 political groups, who speak 24 different languages. Mike Johnson and I like to compete as who has the most difficult job in finding majorities.

As you can imagine, finding a middle ground is not always easy. But I can tell you that time and again, we manage. Because in the words of your founding father, Thomas Jefferson, "every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle."

That, in my view, is what our transatlantic alliance is about. It is why it endures. It is a partnership built on a simple but powerful truth: we are stronger together. Because when we stood shoulder to shoulder, we changed the course of history. We built a system that, for all its imperfections, has given more people more freedom, more prosperity, and more security than any alternative ever could. Today, we are being called to do so again.

It is why when people look at your star-spangled banner, they do not just see a flag - they see a promise. A symbol of the American ideal. It is the same promise that our European flag represents. That's why when people in Europe's neighbourhood stand against autocracy, when they're on the streets demanding that freedom, they do so under the banner of our 12 golden stars.

And today, in Ukraine, that same fight for our values and ideals continue. For three years, men, women – girls and boys who ought to be in school - have risked everything to stand against tyranny. And they are doing so not just for themselves, but for all of us. Because we know that when democracy is threatened somewhere, it is a threat to all of us everywhere.

For the benefit of those who may see history through different lenses, I also want to make one thing absolutely clear: The European Union is first and foremost a peace project.

The entire point of 6 countries coming together to pool their coal and steel production just after the end of the Second World War, was to push the prospect of another brutal, deadly war further and further away. To make it “not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible.” Peace is the essence of the European Union.

So of course, we want peace in Ukraine. We have always wanted that. We know, as well as anyone else, the cost and the devastation of war. Generations of Europeans lived it; and still remember it. So peace will always, always, be something we are for.

At the same time, we also need to be honest with ourselves: peace without freedom, peace without dignity, peace without justice, peace not based on the principle of ‘nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine’, is no peace at all. Europeans who spent half a century under a boot behind an Iron Curtain understand this all too well.

So yes, let’s talk about peace. That is always a good thing. And let’s be clear about what that means. A Ukraine that is not supported, that does not have the strength to resist, will not be in a position to find that elusive peace. That’s why we stood with Ukraine. That’s why we continue to do so still.

Because we know that peace must be a lasting one, and that means security for Ukraine and a deterrent for those who think they can take it by force.

We cannot underestimate the very real danger that will come with simply postponing what is happening now into an even, larger, wider, war a couple of years down the line. This is something that Europe has been saying since day one. It was articulated very well by French President Macron earlier this week. Europe is ready to play our part in guaranteeing peace and stability in Ukraine because we know that this means peace and stability in Europe and that is a win-win for all.

We may have our occasional disagreements; we will all defend our positions, but we are friends and partners. Not because we are homogenous, but because our greatest victories come from our shared conviction of doing what is right. That is what makes us truly great. And we can do that while upholding our values, while honouring our fallen heroes, while strengthening the very ideals that made our continents so great in the first place. In this new world, that must be our guiding light. That must be the spirit that pushes us forward.

Thank you.