

President Metsola's remarks at the European Council
19th December 2024, Brussels

Good morning dear colleagues.

If there is one thing that will define our continent in the coming years, it is our capacity to remain united in purpose. In 2024, we stood-up. And we can be proud of that. But in 2025, we need to step-up if we are truly serious about asserting Europe's place on the world stage. We have little other choice.

When it comes to Ukraine, we need to intensify our efforts to move towards peace. But not just any peace - not some false version of peace peddled by Russia, but a true and lasting peace. Peace with dignity, peace with freedom, peace with justice.

We need a path to real peace. But the guiding principle must remain 'Nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine'. It is one thing to be given a stage, but entirely another to have the voice to command attention.

Ukraine must be able to remain speaking from a position of strength. That is why it is strategic to maintain our support for President Zelenskyy's Peace Plan Formula and Victory Plan. It is strategic and in our collective interest to maintain the freezing of Russia's assets and agree on further sanctions against Putin and his allies - something the European Parliament has long called for. And why it is strategic to remain unwavering in our diplomatic, financial, military and humanitarian aid with Ukraine.

With Ukrainians entering another winter of war - and potentially their toughest one yet, the European Parliament is ramping up support to protect Ukraine's energy infrastructure. In doing so, we are mobilising allies worldwide to ensure that Ukraine remains high on the global agenda and that they receive the broadest possible international support.

This sense of urgency extends to our broader neighbourhood where Russian interference in Moldova, in Georgia and in the Western Balkans remains one of our most pressing security concerns. And we all agree - because we have been saying that enlargement is a geopolitical necessity for years. Yet, over the last decade, we have lost more Members than we have gained. My point is that if we continue to drag our feet, then we should not be surprised if others step-in to fill-in the void.

We are not too late. In Georgia, people have been protesting in the streets for weeks, peacefully calling for a European future. In Moldova, President Maia Sandu is pushing for the swift adoption of the Moldova Growth facility. The Parliament will speed up the process on this. Yesterday at the Western Balkans Summit, we heard from leaders about their efforts in converging themselves with the European Union. Of course, reforms must be genuine and implementation will be key. Enlargement must remain merit based, founded on our criteria. But we need to step-up our efforts too.

Like we did when we took the historic decision to fully integrate Romania and Bulgaria into the Schengen Area. We know that our Romanian and Bulgarian friends had been working so hard and for so long for this. So I speak in both an institutional and personal capacity when I say: Congratulations, it is well deserved.

Now when we speak about our broader neighbourhood, a free and democratic Belarus must be part of our discussions. The so-called Presidential elections scheduled for the 26th of January will again expose the lack of freedom and democracy in the country. It will be an important moment when people will turn their eyes to Europe. And when they do, they deserve to see real European leadership, real decisions and real actions.

The same is true for the situation in the Middle East. The recent ceasefire agreement between Israel and Lebanon offers a glimmer of hope. It will save lives, provide relief and offer a chance for recovery. But peace cannot be sustained by hope alone. That is why in Gaza, our calls for the release of hostages will remain steadfast. Our calls for a ceasefire will remain resolute. Our efforts towards de-escalation will remain strong. And our work for long-term peace must remain unwavering.

In Syria, the situation is also critical. Millions of Syrians are looking for a free, stable, and secure future as Bashar al-Assad's brutal regime lies in tatters. What happens in the next days matters. And the choices we make now will shape that future.

Dialogue, unity, respect for fundamental rights, and international law must guide the way forward. Now is our moment to step up. To intensify our engagement with partners in the region to find a solution. The consequences of inaction are too high.

Let me end by mentioning Edmundo González Urrutia, Venezuela's legitimate President-elect, and María Corina Machado, the leader of the democratic forces in the country. This week, the European Parliament honoured them with our 2024 Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. In this critical moment, we need to remain united by maintaining our support so that Edmundo González Urrutia can return home next month to take his rightful place as President.

Europe has a role to play in Ukraine, in our neighbourhood, in the Middle East, in Latin America and around the world. And it is time we live up to that, to the promise of Europe, together.

Thank you.