

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

‘Europe at a crossroads’the title could not be more fitting. Because that’s where the European stands : at a crossroads, at a turning point.

And as we stand on the threshold of the European elections, we are acutely aware of the myriad challenges that confront us in this complex socio-economic and geopolitical landscape.

In these times of uncertainty, where the very fabric of democracy, solidarity, and cohesion in Europe is **tested**, we know that nothing is granted and that we must approach this moment with a profound sense of **responsibility** and **determination**.

Allow me to quote **Enrico Letta**, former Italian Prime Minister and author of the recent report on the **Single Market** which has been widely commented since its publication: *“The EU stands at a crucial juncture, faced with multifaceted economic threats that ask for a strategic and cohesive response. Recognizing the evolving landscape of external economic security threats, a comprehensive approach to enhance EU’s resilience, to support its economic competitiveness and safeguard its interests is imperative.”*

A very relevant summary of the situation. Enrico Letta uses the word “crucial juncture” which is equivalent to “crossroads”. Both call for a **sense of urgency**. And I am sure that we will find similar expressions in the soon to be published report of Mario Draghi on the EU’s competitiveness.

It can be assumed that the content of both reports will be instrumental in the shaping of the priorities of the next institutional cycle.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have to be clear-eyed about a world that has become more contested and geopolitical.

The upcoming elections represent far more than just a political event. They are a pivotal moment, a “crossroads” (!) where the fate of our continent hangs in the

balance. Our response to the pressing issues of our time will shape the future not only of Europe but of generations to come.

In confronting these unprecedented challenges, we must **draw upon the lessons of history** – and this is why I warmly welcome the relentless engagement of the university and especially of Elena Danescu in putting the history of the European Union to the forefront.

History serves as our guide, offering us insights into the resilience and fortitude of nations, regions, and communities in the face of adversity. History has shown that it is in times of crises that the European Union is at its best. History reminds us of the importance of unity, solidarity, and cooperation in times of crisis. It reminds us of the origins of the EU: a **project of peace**, of prosperity and of solidarity. 70 years later this is still true although we are now investing heavily in our defence capacities. But this is not at all contrary to our original ideas and objectives; it is just another way to reach the same aim: that of peace.

But we also must **look ahead** and get **prepared** for what is yet to come. Because we know that new crises will hit us and sometimes surprise us. We need to be more assertive if we want to be and stay leaders in the international scene.

The EU has changed dramatically during the von der Leyen mandate: we have realised that we are **vulnerable** in many regards, including critical sectors, and that we need more commitment, more investment when it comes to economic security and defence. Unthinkable at the beginning of the institutional cycle, we are now investing massively in a new defence and security architecture in parallel to our efforts striving for reinforced competitiveness in a context not only of geopolitical tensions but also of geo-economic rivalry.

We will bring these **lessons learned** and our greater **maturity** into the new institutional cycle. And let's not forget our **solidarity**, which has grown too over the years, although – let's be honest – there are some cracks...

We have to fix these cracks and work on our **internal strength**.

As Europeans, we also need to look beyond our borders, in order to be able to claim our **strategic autonomy** – which is and will remain an **open** one.

But above all, as we navigate the complexities of the present moment, we must recognize that the true strength of Europe lies in its **people** – in their participation, their engagement, and their commitment to shaping a better future. It is in this spirit that we must foster dialogue, encourage debate, show the added value of the European Union and promote critical thinking – like we do this evening, together with you!

Now more than ever, we need **active and informed citizens** who are willing to stand up for their beliefs, who are unafraid to challenge the status quo, and who are committed to building a more inclusive and just society. And among these citizens, the younger generations occupy a place of particular importance. They are the torchbearers of our future, the architects of the Europe we aspire to create.

Just a week ago, we were witnessing a beautiful moment of engaged and committed EU citizenship on the occasion of the Europe Day festivities. It was very encouraging to see so many (7.500!) visitors from various backgrounds and nationalities following our invitation and celebrating our unity, diversity and democracy.

In this regard, it is with particular concern that I took note no later than this morning of the latest **Eurobarometer** results according to which the Luxembourg youth is the least interested of all the Member States to vote on 9th June with 41%. I will not hide from you that I was disappointed, all the more that I have invested a lot of time in actively reaching out on many occasions to young people by visiting schools and engaging with them on the challenges and opportunities of the EU. But rather than to leave it at this and to become bitter, it is our duty to ask ourselves what this result actually means. Does it mean that the youngsters don't feel heard enough? Are they not enough aware of what the EU brings to citizens? Are our explanations not relevant enough for them? Do we get too much lost in abstract concepts, acronyms or theories? For sure, we can and we should do more to engage with them and to speak their language. We need young people to believe in the European Union, we need their buy in because it is our and their future we are talking about.

I agree with Roberta Metsola that we have to invest more efforts in making the EU again a **project of enthusiasm and of convictions**. The conviction that we are able to build a Union which is secure and resilient. The conviction that together, we are stronger and better prepared to face a new future.

Today, as we approach the European elections, let us recommit ourselves to the principles that bind us together as Europeans – to **democracy**, to **human rights**, and to the **rule of law**.

Let us seize this “crossroads-moment”, this opportunity to reaffirm our **shared values** and to forge a path forward that is rooted in solidarity and cooperation.

Thank you for your attention.