

Introductory remarks by President Charles Michel at the videoconference of EU leaders with US President Biden



Good afternoon, President Biden. Thank you for accepting our invitation. We are delighted to welcome you today. It's not common practice for the European Council to host foreign guests at our regular meetings. The last time was 11 years ago. It was your good friend, Barack Obama.

In Washington, it might not be clear what the European Council does. As you know, the European Council is the gathering of the 27 EU Heads of State and Heads of Government, each responsible to their own people and parliaments. This group is the strategic hub of our Union. And we decide on the orientation for our European project.

Mr President, you know well the challenges of bi-partisanship. Just imagine, partisanship times 27! Because 27 Member States.

Yet, most importantly, in the European Council, day after day, we forge our unity. By consensus. We decided here to become the first climate neutral continent by 2050. We decided here on our historic 1.8 trillion Covid recovery plan. On top of our national stimulus plans.

It is here, for example, that we determine the EU's policy towards China, Russia and Turkey. And after the US elections, we discussed what your Presidency would mean for our transatlantic relationship. We are united in our assessment. This is a historic opportunity to re-energise our cooperation. And deepen our historic bond.

Since your election, we have talked a lot about you. Now we are happy to talk directly with you. America is back. And we are happy you are back.

Today, Covid-19 is the top priority. No one is safe until everyone is safe. We must join forces to defeat the virus.

This includes working closely together on vaccines. To boost production and delivery, and ensure open supply chains. We will be the major producers of vaccines – to protect our people, and people around the world. So we must also lead efforts – through the COVAX Facility – to make sure vaccines reach all countries.

We have all the tools – science, ability, resources, and the collective will. By standing together, shoulder-to-shoulder, we can show that democracies are best suited to protect citizens, to promote dignity, and to generate prosperity.

The shock caused by the pandemic must be a wake-up call. And we must build back better and smarter. That's why the European Union has undertaken a

fundamental twin transformation, with our Green Deal and our Digital Agenda. We were the first bloc to commit to climate neutrality by 2050. And others have followed. Your decision to bring America back to the Paris Agreement is wonderful news. It's music to our ears. And we support the Earth Day summit you will convene next month.

In digital, we also want to lead by example. And avoid abusing our data resources like we have abused our natural resources. We believe people will not accept the over-exploitation of their personal data. Whether by companies in pursuit of profit. Or by states for the purpose of controlling their citizens. This is neither sustainable for business, nor for democracy.

We need a wise framework, where our digital resources will be used for innovation and economic development. And we must also protect the "environment" of our democracies and our individual freedoms. This is a complex and exciting challenge. Let's frame this digital democratic standard together.

After the atrocities of WW II, we worked together to build the rules-based international order. We created the United Nations and other international institutions.

And for several decades, this rules-based order was challenged by the Soviet Union. They imposed their own rules and threatened with brutal force those who resisted. When the Soviet empire fell, we believed in the so-called "End of History" ... the final victory of democracy. Indeed, democracy expanded. Free markets progressed. More countries joined the multilateral system.

But thirty years later, we know we were wrong about the general victory of liberal democracy. Authoritarian tendencies morphed into new models. They abused or bent the rules, using new tools (disinformation, cyber, and hybrid threats) to attack democracies, both from outside and from within. These new regimes threaten democracy, human rights and the rules-based order. At least as much as the Cold War regimes.

This is why NATO remains the cornerstone of our collective peace and security. And we Europeans are determined to assume our fair share of the burden. More than ever, it is up to America and Europe, with our like-minded partners, to promote the democratic model and free market economy.

What we do together today will determine the world our children and grandchildren will live in, tomorrow. That's why yesterday we were pleased to host Secretary Blinken and discuss geopolitical topics like China, Russia, Iran or the Horn of Africa, Western Balkans, Eastern Partnership.

Let's band together – to build a fairer, greener and more democratic world. Anchored in our common history. The EU is a peace project. If we live in peace, freedom and prosperity today it is because 76 years ago, countless Americans landed on our shores. They fought for our freedom, justice, and democracy. And so many died – in the name of liberty. The Battle of the Bulge, in my home country, lives on still today in the hearts and minds of families. This binds us forever.

Let's build on this friendship – to forge a new transatlantic mind-set. A strong basis for our renewed cooperation. Thank you again for joining us this evening. And for sharing your thoughts on our future cooperation.

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