

Speech by First Vice-President Frans Timmermans at the European Parliament plenary session on the preparation of the European Council meeting of 28 and 29 June 2018

Thank you Mr President,

Honourable Members,

I would be amiss if I would not start with what passed in Charlevoix. I am not one to declare that the rules-based international system, so carefully built up after the Second World War, is now collapsing before our very eyes. However, it is the first time since 1945 that an American President has not seen it as an American strategic interest to work hard to ensure a vibrant and unified Europe and a robust transatlantic relationship.

This means that the EU needs to take its destiny more into its own hands. And we should be confident about our ability to do so, because our foundations are strong. Our Union is built upon Member States that voluntarily and democratically decided to link their destinies and shape their future together.

The basis for this shared destiny is the tripod of democracy, the rule of law and the respect for human rights. This is how one creates unity between big and small, how one creates unity in full respect of our diversity.

And it is in turn our unity that gives us strength globally to pursue better and more sustainable standards for everyone, to defend global trading rules, to boldly address climate change, to protect our citizens against geopolitical and/or geo-economic challenges, and to better grasp the opportunities that globalisation has to offer.

And so this month's European Council comes at an auspicious time. And it is a good opportunity to show political will, decisiveness and unity.

But we should look beyond the daily twitter feed, and also keep our eye on the ball with regard to the work that lies ahead of us.

Last December, leaders agreed to come back to a number of issues in March. In March, they agreed to come back to those same issues in June.

While important decisions take time, we cannot postpone decisions indefinitely. The situation in the Mediterranean is a stark reminder that we cannot wish problems away. No fence is high enough and no sea is wide enough to render our countries immune to the greatest pull factor there is: the freedom, the prosperity and the stability of our Union.

In recent months, under the guidance of the Bulgarian Presidency, the European Union has shown what is possible when we are united and committed to finding European solutions.

We agreed for instance on the difficult issue of the Posted Workers Directive thanks in large part to this House. Equal pay for equal work in the same place will now become a reality for all Europeans.

We made substantial progress on our Digital Single Market with regard to abolishment of roaming, and on clarifying and strengthening audio-visual media services or telecoms rules.

With regard to Brexit too, the EU is united. Our goal is to ensure we together with our British partners do 'as little harm' as possible to either side and to work together towards an orderly process in the interest of all citizens in the EU and in the United Kingdom.

The European Council of June will take stock on a number of issues, in particular the question of Ireland and Northern Ireland, as well as the future relationship between the UK and the EU. We still have three more weeks to go and it is important to use this time to achieve real progress in the interest of all. Parliament, Council and Commission are working together to deliver.

In the next months we also have to deliver on the legislative files we identified as our common priorities under the two Joint Declarations. From plastics to migration, from energy to transport, from the European Solidarity Corps to the European Citizens' Initiative.

We have promised this to the European citizens before the next elections. It will be our collective achievement. The Joint Declarations guide our work. So let us stick to our commitments.

As we approach the June European Council, this then is the spirit and the approach that all leaders must take. United by our values, linked by our interests, and concerted in our actions.

Das gilt auch für die Wirtschafts- und Währungsunion. Denn je stärker diese ist, umso mehr verleiht sie der Union als Ganzes Kraft, was sich wiederum positiv auf den Lebensstandard der Europäerinnen und Europäer auswirkt. Deshalb ist es unsere Pflicht, den Euro zu stärken.

Die Kommission hat bereits im Dezember ein umfassendes Paket vorgelegt, um unserer Gemeinschaftswährung zusätzliche Stärke und Handlungsfähigkeit zu verleihen.

Wir haben außerdem vor wenigen Wochen konkrete Haushaltsinstrumente vorgeschlagen, um Reformen zu fördern und Investitionen im Euroraum selbst in Zeiten asymmetrischer Schocks zu gewährleisten.

Dass die Mitgliedstaaten die Vorschläge der Kommission diskutieren, ist ein erster wichtiger Schritt. Doch es reicht nicht, wenn wir lediglich feststellen, was notwendig und geboten ist.

Wir haben zwar bereits Fortschritte gemacht und Lehren aus der Krise gezogen – sei es bei der Reduzierung notleidender Kredite im europäischen Bankensektor, beim Aufbau der Kapitalmarktunion oder bei der Einigung im Ecofin-Rat im Mai, als wir Maßnahmen ergriffen haben, um die Risiken im Bankensektor weiter zu reduzieren. Das war ein wichtiger Schritt hin zur Vollendung der Bankenunion.

Der Gipfel im Juni, der "Leaders' Agenda", ist der Moment, die Ideen und den politischen Willen endlich auch in konkrete Entscheidungen und Taten umzusetzen.

Wir müssen uns endlich darauf einigen, dass der europäische Stabilitätsmechanismus die Letztsicherung für den einheitlichen Abwicklungsfonds übernehmen kann. Und dafür müssen wir endlich auch beim einheitlichen europäischen Einlagensicherungssystem weiterkommen, das nicht über Nacht aufgebaut werden kann, sondern für das Vorbedingungen zu erfüllen sind.

Und gestatten Sie mir auch den mehrjährigen Finanzrahmen zu erwähnen. Ich glaube, dass wir uns vor den nächsten Wahlen unbedingt einigen müssen.

En ce qui concerne la gestion des migrations, la situation n'est en rien comparable à ce qu'elle était il y a trois ans. Mais ici également nous avons encore du travail à faire pour compléter la mise en place d'une politique migratoire fondée sur la responsabilité et la solidarité tout en assurant une meilleure protection de nos frontières extérieures.

Les négociations ont déjà bien avancé sur une bonne partie des éléments proposés par la Commission pour réformer notre régime d'asile européen commun, notamment sur l'harmonisation des conditions d'accueil et les conditions et standards de protection, ainsi que sur un cadre commun de réinstallation pour renforcer les voies d'entrée légales. Nous avons également marqué du progrès sur le renforcement d'Eurodac, la base de données de l'Union européenne contenant les empreintes digitales des demandeurs d'asiles, et nous avons déjà un accord politique sur le renforcement de l'Agence de l'Union européenne pour l'asile.

Le Parlement s'est engagé dans toutes ces négociations avec détermination et a réussi à améliorer la qualité des textes. Et je voudrais saluer les efforts considérables accomplis par la présidence bulgare dans ce domaine.

Mais pour finaliser un accord sur l'ensemble de la réforme de notre politique d'asile, il faut maintenant trouver un compromis sur le mécanisme de Dublin. Et je veux soutenir avec toute force de la part de la Commission les propos du Président du Parlement à cet égard. Là aussi on peut noter des avancées, en particulier la création d'un volet préventif de ce mécanisme. Prévenir la crise future est aussi important que la gestion de la crise elle-même.

Mais évidemment il faut reconnaître et respecter les différentes positions et sensibilités qui existent entre nos pays sur ces questions très délicates. Il est temps de résoudre ce problème. Tous les éléments sont sur la table, il est temps d'agir – je suis en parfait accord avec le Président du Parlement

européen.

Ainsi la Commission attend des chefs d'Etat et de gouvernement de bien vouloir se pencher sérieusement sur la question de Dublin et d'esquisser les orientations nécessaires pour parvenir à des solutions équilibrés qui aient l'appui de tous et qui soient des solutions solides et durables, fondées sur la base de nos valeurs en commun.

On risque non seulement de perdre nos valeurs mais de porter atteinte à notre humanité même si on ne trouve pas des solutions qui nous donnent la possibilité de voir des personnes en crise comme des êtres humains qui ont besoin de notre aide.

Etant donné l'importance de ce défi, avec une importance, je crois, existentielle pour l'Union européenne, la Commission proposera cet après-midi un renforcement ambitieux et important des moyens financiers pour soutenir notre politique commune dans les cours des prochaines années.

Je vous remercie pour votre attention, Monsieur le Président.

Closing remarks

I have been listening very carefully to the debate on migration, and having dealt with this issue over the last four years, I try and formulate for myself why it has been impossible to find a solution so far at the European level. I think the answer lies in the concept of moral hazard. I think there is a lack of confidence between the Member States that the other state will do what they agreed to do to find a solution.

Indeed, Italy and Greece for a very long time complained and said: you are leaving us alone; we need to find a solution, Dublin does not work and we are swamped, we are overwhelmed by the numbers of refugees arriving.

And then for too long they got the answer: that is Dublin, deal with it, it is your task!

And then of course we arrived at a situation of waving through. And this led to a lot of suspicion in other Member States: they are not doing their job, they are waving through refugees by the numbers.

So I think there is no state that can claim to be completely innocent in the situation we have found ourselves now.

I also believe there is some criticism possible if people in Italy keep saying: we were left completely alone, we were completely abandoned.

Yes, for a long time that is true. But I find it difficult to explain that when I go to Germany where I look at the numbers of people, refugees that were taken up in Germany. Look at the number of refugees that were taken up in Sweden, incredibly – a vast problem that now is integration of these refugees in many countries.

So as long as we keep refusing the idea that we have a collective problem

that can only be tackled with collective solutions, as long as we do not see that we will not find a solution. As long as Member States just stick to their own solution and say "we are the only ones who are right, and as long as the rest of Union does not do what we do", we will not find a solution and we will fail collectively.

Given the size of the migration challenge the world faces, not just Europe, given the developments in Africa, do you really think that building walls and fences and refusing to accept ships is going to bring a solution? Will that stop the pressure? Do you really think that if we do not stick together on this individual Member States will be able to reach agreements with the states of origin to take back their migrants if they do not have the right to asylum? Do you really think that individually we can create a prospect for Africa that will allow young Africans to see future in their own country instead of feeling the need to come to Europe? Do you really think that if we take away a bit of the humanity of people on ships and then say these are just migrants, that we will stay, that we will continue our policy on the basis of our values and human rights? Do you not agree that by denying other people's humanity, we take away part of our own humanity? Does that not kill us morally, if we continue like that?

And I am not saying everyone who wants to come to Europe should be welcomed, but I am saying we need to put an end to the dying in the Mediterranean and I am saying this can only be done if Europe collectively devises stronger protection of our external borders. If we finally devise a common European asylum policy, if we finally make headway in having agreements with the countries of origin, so that they take back the citizens. If we finally have a realistic plan of investment in Africa so that Africa develops in a way that people want to stay in Africa. And if we finally come to terms with the fact that in a time of crisis and one or two or three of our Member States overwhelmed, they should be able to count on the solidarity of all Member States.

And the only way we will find a sustainable solution for the migration issue – which will not go away, whatever we do – is if we do all these things at the same time. There is not one – I know, according to your political preferences you have a preference for one or the other of the solutions, but none of you can close your eyes to the fact that you could only deal with it if all these solutions are part of our approach. And if we do not do this as Europeans, who else will? Member States will not be able to do it on their own, whatever their policies are.

Let me end on one point. We are at a risk in this time of turbulence and huge challenges to fall into the trap of entering into Faustian deals: "to handle the migration issue, perhaps we should not have as much of the rule of law or the respect for human rights as is good for us". Please stay away from that Faustian deal, because you will lose on all scores.

What is the price of unity of the European Union? Should the price of unity of the European Union be: let us not make a point of the rule of law and human rights, just so we can have unity? I can guarantee you: if the respect of the rule of law and human rights is no longer a quintessential element of

our Union, we will lose both the human rights and the rule of law and the European Union, and that is a price that is far too high to pay.

Thank you very much, Mr President.