

Speech by President Juncker at the Plenary session of the European Parliament on the debate with the Prime Minister of Ireland, Leo Varadkar, on the Future of Europe

Mister President,

Taoiseach,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To be very short: I could not agree more.

But I have to deliver a speech because the disappointment would be too big, if I did not do so.

I am delighted that my good friend Leo comes before this House today and I would like to thank President Tajani and the Parliament for holding this timely debate on the future of our Union. This is the first of the kind and the first of many I hope.

Since he became Prime Minister, Leo has proven to be a committed European. I knew it before, but he has proven it, now being where he is.

It is fitting that today we remember – with sadness – another true Irish and European statesman.

I would like to pay my personal tribute to Peter Sutherland. He was the first ever Commissioner to receive the Gold Medal from this House.

I was deeply saddened to hear of his passing. Peter Sutherland was a proud Irishman, another giant of European politics and a friend to so many. He will be missed but his legacy lives on.

As Peter in the past shaped our policies of today, so can we shape the policies of the future with the choices we make today. It was less than a year ago that I presented to you the White Paper on the future of Europe – five possible scenarios for our project. Since then the debate has picked up in all corners of Europe.

The White Paper set a new approach: debate, not dictate. And the White Paper and the different scenarios are still inspiring the debate across Europe. However, the future of Europe cannot remain a scenario. The time to take decisions is now. Because citizens will head to the polls in May 2019. And in doing so, they should have a clear understanding of how the European Union will develop over the years to come.

Last September, I therefore presented to you my very own vision for a more united, stronger and more democratic Union: a Union where solidarity and responsibility go hand in hand in all policy areas – from migration to the banking and monetary Union; from energy to our common budget. A Union where the rule of law is not optional but the very basis of everything we do – from implementing decisions jointly taken to preparing enlargements. A Union of equals where the euro and Schengen – the most visible expressions of European integration – continue to unite our continent.

Since the publication of the White Paper, a lot has happened: the Commission has organised hundreds of Citizens' Dialogues – important – six of them in Ireland. And I am happy to see that the Taoiseach himself has launched Citizens' Dialogues on the future of Europe across Ireland – from Galway to Dublin.

This is how it should be. To succeed in Europe, we have to put an end to this eternal artificial opposition between the Union and its Member States. Our Union can only be built with our Member States, never against them. And that is why your invitation of national leaders to this House, President Tajani, is so important.

I am delighted to see the commitment from the European Council. It has agreed the Leaders' Agenda: 17 Summits in the next 18 months on the road to Sibiu – Hermannstadt – to chart our common future. This is even more than we had at the height of the Eurozone crisis. But with one important difference: This time we are not repairing the burning plane while flying, as we had to do it during the crisis. Instead, we are now fixing the roof of our European house while the sun is shining.

We now know what we need to do together: completing our Economic and Monetary Union, securing our borders, delivering on our social agenda, making our tax system fairer, reforming our asylum system, getting back to Schengen and completing the Digital Market and Energy Union.

In all these talks on Europe's future I have been privileged to have a close working relationship with the Taoiseach, and there is no better example than the way we worked during the first phase of negotiations with the United Kingdom.

When it comes to the issue of Ireland in these negotiations, Europe is united. It is all for one and one for all.

The Commission and the Irish government worked tirelessly, side-by-side to help us reach the sufficient progress needed to move onto the next phase of the talks.

This partnership will continue and this partnership will grow stronger as we work on the future of our Union at 27.

I read with pleasure Leo's speech at a Citizens' Dialogue last November when he set out his vision for a *“Europe that continues to do well what it does well; that focuses on the big things and that – where appropriate – devolves*

some powers back to Member States, municipalities and regions". For me, this is more than just a beautiful poem – these are the essential questions, we all need to answer when going into the negotiations for the next EU budget.

This debate on the budget will be an open and honest discussion. And one that goes right to the heart of the debate on the future of the European Union: if we want the European Union to be no more than a single market, then a single, small budget will be sufficient. But if we want a European border and coast guard to protect our external borders or European civil protection teams to help in case of floods or fires, then the answer is simple: Member States must put their money where their mouths are.

Sehr verehrter Herr Präsident,

genau weil diese Zukunftsfragen jetzt in Angriff genommen werden müssen, haben wir vorgeschlagen, unter der Leitung des Ersten Vizepräsidenten Timmermans eine Taskforce über Subsidiarität und Proportionalität einzurichten. Im nächsten Wahlkampf wird es genauso sein wie im letzten Wahlkampf – wenige haben nur den Mut in Bürgerversammlungen, auf öffentlichen Plätzen, in Bierzelten oder sonst wo aufzustehen, wenn es heißt die Europäische Union und die Europäische Politik in Gänze zu verteidigen. Man wird immer wieder den Bürgern sagen: Europa macht zu viel und Europa muss weniger tun. Es gibt Bereiche, wo Europa mehr tun muss – ich habe sie oft hier erwähnt – es gibt aber auch Bereiche, wo wir uns zurücknehmen sollen, wo weniger mehr wäre und wo weniger Tatendrang mehr Fortschritt brächte als blindes Losstürmen, Zielen entgegen, die uns eigentlich von unserem Instrumentarium her unerreichbar scheinen.

Deshalb wäre es mein Wunsch, dass das Europäische Parlament sich an dieser Taskforce beteiligen würde. Mir wird berichtet – but this is a House full of rumours –, dass das Europäische Parlament an dieser Taskforce nicht teilnehmen würde und wolle. Das ist ein grober Fehler, weil wir brauchen das Europäische Parlament, wenn wir darüber reden welche Kompetenzen der Europäischen Union in die Mitgliedstaaten zurückverlagert werden können. Und dies wird eine Debatte sein, wo man natürlich dann auch darüber reden muss, was wir besser machen können, indem wir mehr tun – auch über neue Kompetenzen muss geredet werden. Aber die Hauptaufgabe ist Ordnung zu bringen in das Zuständigkeitsgerangel zwischen Europäischer Union und den Mitgliedstaaten. Und ich bitte deshalb herzlich, vor allem die großen Fraktionsführer dieser Welt, diesen Beschluss – falls es ihn denn gibt – zu überprüfen. Weil es ist nicht im Interesse des Europäischen Parlaments, dass Kommission und Vertreter der Mitgliedstaaten sich alleine – ohne das Mittun des Europäischen Parlamentes – mit diesen Fragen beschäftigen.

Mister President,

Since 1999, the Good Friday Agreement has preserved peace and enabled progress where there once was bloodshed and discord. We all know that peace can be fragile. And I see no more important use of our new budget than guaranteeing and financing the peace process in Ireland. This is an unconditional European commitment. This is what the Commission will deliver with our proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework in May. Our

new budget must be as ambitious as the goals we set ourselves and as flexible as possible to adapt to new and unforeseen challenges. Our future cannot wait.

Together with Leo, with the Irish, and with others, we will swim in that direction.

Thank you.