



State of the Union: No time to waste to deliver on promises

12/09/2018

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Statement by

I salute President Jean-Claude Juncker for today's State of the Union in the European Parliament.



At the start of a difficult period, culminating with Brexit and the European elections of 23-26 May, the European Commission President has shown that it is essential for pro-Europeans to speak out, loudly and strongly, shouting that Europe is worth fighting for.

His speech was not a farewell, despite being his last State of the Union address, but a comprehensive programme for the year ahead. There is no time to waste. Europeans are just seeing the buds of recovery, after a multitude of crises, but we are not out of the tunnel.

To get there, decision-makers must accelerate delivery on the promises made to build a sustainable and inclusive Europe --- the Digital Single Market, Banking Union, Capital Markets Union, a deeper Economic and Monetary Union, Social Pillar, Energy Union, Trade and Security Union to cite a few.

More than leadership, Europe needs a new humanism based on responsibility to do the right thing, and yes bring together the East and the West, the North and the South: a rEUnaissance. This is the European Patriotism, founded on defending and promoting EU core values and principles against illiberal threats.

Next week, EU leaders will convene in Salzburg to discuss migration. On the table, the Commission has put a number of proposals to manage what is likely the mother of all challenges. Solidarity and the Rule of Law are at the core of finding a lasting compromise. Without solidarity, Europe will risk irreparable divisions, which will further feed political discontent and give greater ammunition to nationalists.

Migration is not a European problem, but a global one, which Europe can help solve and in so doing gain greater clout to shape the new world order. I fully agree with President Juncker's agenda for Africa. Africa is indeed the future and so is Europe. At the EESC, we have pushed for such a partnership for years, I am glad that our work has been finally transformed into a proposal for a new Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs between Europe and Africa.

Europe is continuously reinventing itself. Let's not be fooled by those who pretend it's not. Juncker's proposal to move to Qualified Majority Voting in external relations, human rights or allow the euro to play its full role on the international scene will make Europe stronger. There is no doubt to be had about that.

Lastly, I share the political intention of President Juncker to turn already towards the political *rendez-vous* in Sibiu. The European Leaders' meeting in Sibiu on 9 May 2019 will be a crucial one and I support, in view of the EU elections, the sense of political urgency to get ready for it.

As the EESC's President, together with the groups and sections of the Committee, I will do all that I can to ensure that this House will be able to send, on behalf of European civil society, a strong political message to Sibiu. It's now or never.

Europe is at a crossroads. It can divide itself, fall back and finally succumb to the challenges of the future. Or it can dare to strive for new ambitions, linking in a new way freedom and security, taking action for a new season of shared prosperity.

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