



European responses to strengthen our economies and societies against the background of the current geo-political context

Debate with Charles Michel, President of the European Council

Speech by Diversity Europe Group President Séamus BOLAND

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Dear Mr Michel,

Thank you very much for taking the time to be with us today, it is appreciated and you are very welcome. You have already outlined the scale and scope of the challenges, so allow me to go straight to my three recommendations.

Firstly, within the EU and its Member States, we need to introduce **emergency measures to alleviate the high prices faced by consumers** on everything from **energy**, to **food**, actually across the board. Price hikes in energy and food grab the most headlines, but in reality everything has become more expensive and the living standards are **dropping to the levels of the 1950s**.

Whether this counts as a crisis depends on your income. But for the poorest, the choice is already between heating and food. And you will recall that last week, the media headlines stressed that the missile attacks on **Odessa** would result in **global food shortages**.

So the proposal that I would like to put on the table is that we need an **emergency system, a new Marshall Plan to help Europeans cope**. Millions of citizens have reached the limit of what they can do with good budgeting. Now we need specific and direct assistance such as **consumer credit, universal credit, European minimum wages and income**.

Secondly, the **energy stranglehold** that Mr Putin is squeezing around Europe should be seen as an **opportunity**. An opportunity to make us more **resilient and secure in the future**. Recent studies show that the effects of the Russian gas and oil embargo on the EU will range from between 0.5% and 3% of GDP. However, this cost will be partly offset by the ability of our **economies to adapt and to find alternative solutions**.

A potential solution and one which could help to overcome the opposition of some EU Member States to embargoes on Russian oil and gas, would be for the **EU to levy a high tariff on Russian energy**, instead of banning it altogether. The EU imports 40% of its gas from Russia, which makes 400 million Euros per day from those sales. With a high European levy and in order to keep selling, Russia would have to **cut prices to remain competitive** with other producers. This would reduce Russian oil profits without disrupting supply to the EU.

My third and final recommendation in the current geo-political context, is for the **EU to remain united in the protection of its own values**. We must achieve this, at any cost. We must maintain the **vision and example of a Union of peace**. Not just for the history books, but for our **identity**. The EU, like any union, is also a thing of the heart. And we should articulate widely and loudly, on what peace means to us and why it is precious.

Mr Michel, I will bring my comments to a close by recalling that 2022 marks 100 years since the publication of the anti-war satirical novels '**Good Soldier Svejk**', by the **Czech author Hasek**. For anyone who has read them, the pure '**idiocy**' of war and the search for **survival** by the average 'little man', echo very loudly and very worryingly with the realities of the war in Ukraine today.

Thank you for your attention.