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Opening Statement in the European Parliament Plenary Session by Ursula von der Leyen, Candidate for President of the European Commission

Strasbourg, 16 July 2019

Monsieur le Président,

Mesdames et Messieurs les députés,

Il y a exactement 40 ans, la première présidente du Parlement européen, Simone Veil, est élue et présente sa vision d'une Europe plus unie et plus juste.

C'est grâce à elle, et à toutes les autres icônes européennes, que je vous présente aujourd'hui ma vision de l'Europe.

Et 40 ans plus tard, c'est avec une grande fierté que je peux dire : **C'est finalement une femme qui est la candidate à la présidence de la Commission européenne.**

Je le suis grâce à tous ceux et toutes celles qui ont brisé les barrières et les conventions. Je le suis grâce à tous ceux et toutes celles qui ont construit une Europe de paix, une Europe unie, une Europe des valeurs.

C'est cette conviction européenne qui m'a guidée tout au long de ma vie et de ma carrière - en tant que mère, en tant que médecin et en tant que femme politique.

C'est ce courage et cette audace des pionnières comme Simone Veil qui est au cœur de ma vision d'Europe.

Et ce sera cet esprit qui guidera la Commission européenne que j'ai l'intention de présider.

Herr Präsident,

Meine Damen und Herren Abgeordnete,

Die Gründungsväter und -mütter Europas haben, aus den Trümmern und der Asche der Weltkriege, ein gewaltiges Werk errichtet. Frieden.

Ein starker gemeinsamer Markt, grenzenloser Handel, Reisen, Forschen und Arbeiten. 500 Millionen Europäerinnen und Europäer leben heute zwischen Riga und Limassol, zwischen Athen und Lissabon in Wohlstand und Freiheit.

Die Generation meiner Kinder kann sich ein Leben ohne dieses Heimatgefühl Europa nicht vorstellen. Als diese glückliche Generation geboren wurde, dachten auch wir Älteren, dass es immer so weiterginge.

Heute ist auch den Letzten klar, dass wir wieder kämpfen müssen und aufstehen müssen für unser Europa. Die ganze Welt ist herausgefordert, mit disruptiven Entwicklungen umzugehen, die auch an Europa nicht vorbeigehen.

Der demografische Wandel, die Globalisierung der Weltwirtschaft, die rasante Digitalisierung unserer Arbeitswelt und natürlich der Klimawandel. Keine dieser Meta-Entwicklungen ist neu, sie wurden von der Wissenschaft lange vorausgesagt. Das Neue ist, dass wir heute als Bürgerinnen und Bürger Europas – egal, in welchem Land wir wohnen – die Auswirkungen konkret erleben und spüren.

Ob es die finnischen Weizenbauern, die durch die Dürre betroffen sind oder ob es die tödliche Hitzewelle in Frankreich ist: Wir spüren den Klimawandel ganz konkret. Ob es die Rentnerin in Irland ist, die mit Online-Banking klarkommen muss, oder der Arbeiter in Polen, der sich nach 20 Jahren im Job weiterbilden muss, um seine Arbeit überhaupt zu behalten: Wir spüren die Digitalisierung konkret. Ob es Regionen in Europa sind, in denen Schulen, Krankenhäuser oder Betriebe schließen müssen: Wir

spüren den demografischen Wandel konkret.

All of this has left people with a feeling of losing control. Of looser ties within our communities. None of these challenges will go away. But there have been different ways to react to these trends. Some are turning towards authoritarian regimes, some are buying their global influence and creating dependencies by investing in ports and roads. And others are turning towards protectionism.

None of these options are for us. **We want multilateralism, we want fair trade, we defend the rules-based order** because we know it is better for all of us. **We have to do it the European way.** But if we are to go down the European path, we must first rediscover our unity. **If we are united on the inside, nobody will divide us from the outside.**

If we close the gaps between us, we can turn today's challenges into tomorrow's opportunities.

A European Union that strives for more

Our most pressing challenge is keeping our planet healthy. This is the greatest responsibility and opportunity of our times. **I want Europe to become the first climate-neutral continent in the world by 2050.** To make this happen, we must take bold steps together. Our current goal of reducing our emissions by 40% by 2030 is not enough.

We must go further. We must strive for more. A two-step approach is needed to **reduce CO2 emissions by 2030 by 50, if not 55%.** The EU will lead international negotiations to increase the level of ambition of other major economies by 2021. Because to achieve real impact, we do not only have to be ambitious at home – we have to do that, yes – but the world has to move together.

To make this happen, I will put forward **a Green Deal for Europe** in my first 100 days in office. I will put forward the first ever **European Climate Law** which will set the 2050 target into law.

This increase of ambition will need investment on a major scale. Public money will not be enough. I will propose a **Sustainable Europe Investment Plan** and turn parts of the European Investment Bank into a **Climate Bank**. This will unlock €1 trillion of investment over the next decade.

It means change. All of us and every sector will have to contribute, from aviation to maritime transport to the way each and everyone of us travels and lives. **Emissions must have a price that changes our behaviour.** To complement this work, and to ensure our companies can compete on a level-playing field, I will introduce a **Carbon Border Tax** to avoid carbon leakage.

But what is good for our planet must also be good for our people and our regions. Of course I know about the importance of cohesion funds. But we need more. We need a just transition for all. Not all of our regions have the same starting point – but we all share the same destination. This is why I will propose a **Just Transition Fund** to support those most affected.

This is the European way: we are ambitious. We leave nobody behind. And we offer perspectives. If we want to succeed with this ambitious plan we need a strong economy. Because what we want to spend we need to earn first.

For that we need to strengthen the backbone of our economies: the **small and medium-sized enterprises.** They are innovative, they are entrepreneurial, they are flexible and agile, they create jobs, they provide vocational training to our youth. But they can only do all this if they have access to capital everywhere in this huge Single market. Let's get rid of all the barriers. Let's open the door. Let's finally complete the **Capital Markets Union.** Our SMEs deserve it.

And we need to work within the **Stability and Growth Pact.** Where investment and reforms are needed, we should make sure they can be done. We should make use of all the flexibility allowed in the rules. We are proud of our economy. We want to make it stronger.

But there is also a clear and simple logic. It's not people that serve the economy. It's the economy that serves our people. In our Social Market Economy we must reconcile the market with the social. Therefore I will **refocus our European Semester to make sure we stay on track with our Sustainable Development Goals.**

And **I will stand for fair taxes** – whether for brick and mortar industries or digital businesses. When the tech giants are making huge profits in Europe, this is fine because we are an open market and we like competition. But if they are making these profits by benefiting from our education system, our skilled workers, our infrastructure and our social security, if this is so, it is not acceptable that they make profits, but they are barely paying any taxes because they play our tax system. If they want to

benefit, they have to share the burden.

Making the most of Europe's potential

Honourable Members,

The European way is also about using all of our potential: our people, our talent, our diversity. It is about creating a fairer and more equal Union. This will drive me forward every single day I am in office – as it has throughout my career.

We have come a long way since I was a minister for family affairs and had to fight to introduce parental pay or access to childcare for families. But the fight for fairness never stops. It is still too difficult for hard working families to make ends meet in Europe. I want to ensure that work pays. In a Social Market Economy, every person that is working full time should earn a **minimum wage** that pays for a decent living. Therefore we will develop a framework, of course in respect of the different labour markets. But I think the optimal option is to have collective bargaining by employers' unions and trade unions because they tailor the minimum wage to the sector or to the region necessary. Of course I am aware there are different models, but we have to create the framework. And I want better protection for those who lose their jobs when our economy takes a severe hit. A **European Unemployment Benefit Reinsurance Scheme** will support our economies and our people in times of external shocks. Of course there are national unemployment insurances but a reinsurance scheme for these heavy external shocks is needed in Europe.

I also want more equality and fairness for our young people. Youth unemployment is at 14.2% in Europe, but ranges from 5% to 40% in some countries. We cannot accept this. Young people have aspirations, they want to work, they want to have a future – and it is our job to let them achieve this. This is why I will make sure the **Youth Guarantee**, which I started when I was a minister for labour affairs in our Council, is working as well as it can in every Member State. And I will support the European Parliament's idea to triple the Erasmus+ budget as part of the next long-term budget.

We have to care for the most vulnerable: our children. We have to fight poverty. I know as a mother of seven that it makes a difference for their entire life if children have access to education, sports, music, healthy food and to a loving environment. We need a **Child Guarantee** to help ensure that every child in Europe at risk of poverty and social exclusion has access to the most basic of rights like healthcare and education. It will empower them and it pays tremendously if we back them when they are young. This is part of my action plan to bring our **Pillar of Social Rights** to life.

And I will start at home by example: I will ensure **full gender equality in my College of Commissioners**. If Member States do not propose enough female Commissioners, I will not hesitate to ask for new names. Since 1958 there have been 183 Commissioners. Only 35 were women. That is less than 20%. We represent half of our population. **We want our fair share**. We also need to talk openly about violence against women. If 1 in 5 women have already suffered physical or sexual violence in the European Union and 55% of women have been sexually harassed, this is clearly not a women's issue. I will propose to **add violence against women on the list of EU crimes defined in the Treaty**. And the European Union should join the Istanbul Convention.

I am convinced: if we close the gaps between us, we will emerge stronger as a Union.

Defending Europe's values

Honourable Members,

The cradle of our European civilisation is Greek philosophy and Roman Law. And our European continent went through its darkest period when we were ruled by dictators and Rule of Law was banished. For centuries, Europeans fought so hard for their liberty and independence.

The Rule of Law is our best tool to defend these freedoms and to protect the most vulnerable in our Union. **This is why there can be no compromise when it comes to respecting the Rule of Law**. There never will be. I will ensure that we use our full and comprehensive toolbox at European level. In addition, I fully support an **EU-wide Rule of Law Mechanism**. To be clear: the new instrument is not an alternative to the existing instruments, but an additional one.

The Commission will always be an independent guardian of the Treaties. Lady Justice is blind – she will defend the Rule of Law wherever it is attacked.

Honourable Members,

The Rule of Law is universal. It applies to all. In the last five years, more than 17,000 people have drowned in the Mediterranean, which has become one of the deadliest borders in the world. At sea there is the duty to save lives and in our Treaties and conventions there is the legal and moral duty to respect the dignity of every human being.

The European Union can and must defend these values. **The European Union needs humane borders. We must save, but saving alone is not enough.** We must reduce irregular migration, we must fight smugglers and traffickers – it is organised crime –, we must preserve the right to asylum and improve the situation of refugees, for example through humanitarian corridors in close cooperation with the UNHCR. We need empathy and decisive action.

I am aware of how difficult and divisive discussions on this issue are. We need to address the legitimate concerns of many and look at how we can overcome our differences. I will propose a **New Pact on Migration and Asylum**, including the **relaunch of the Dublin reform**.

This will allow us to return to a **fully functioning Schengen Area** of free movement, the key driver of our prosperity, security and freedoms. A centrepiece in this ambition is a **reinforced European Border and Coast Guard Agency**. We need to reach a standing corps of 10,000 Frontex border guards not by 2027, but way earlier, at least by 2024.

We have to modernise our asylum system. A Common European Asylum System must be exactly that – common. We can only have stable external borders if we give enough help to Member States facing the most pressure because of where they are on the map.

We need solidarity. We all need to help each other and contribute. We need a new way of burden-sharing. And we must make fair cooperation offers to countries of origin and transit which are in the interests of both sides. Diplomacy, economic development, investment, stability and security are needed so that people have a perspective.

I would like to tell you a story about perspective. Four years ago, I was lucky enough to welcome a 19-year old refugee from Syria into my home and my family. He spoke no German and was deeply scarred by his experience of civil war and flight. Today, 4 years later, he is fluent in German, English and Arabic. He is a community leader by day, in vocational training and a student for his high school degree by night. He is an inspiration for us all. One day, he wants to go home.

A responsible leader in the world

Honourable Members,

As a Defence Minister, I have been many times in this war-torn neighbourhood. I will never forget the words of former President of Iraq Masoum, who said: *We want to see more Europe here.* **The world is calling for more Europe.** The world needs more Europe.

I believe Europe should have a stronger and more united voice in the world – and it needs to act fast. That is why **we must have the courage to take foreign policy decisions by qualified majority.** And to stand united behind them.

The cornerstone of our collective defence will always be NATO. **We will stay transatlantic and we have to become more European.** This is why we created the **European Defence Union**. Our work for our European Union of security and defence is embedded in comprehensive security. Stabilisation always comes with diplomacy, reconciliation and reconstruction.

Our servicemen and servicewomen work side by side with police officers, diplomats and development aid workers. These men and women deserve our utmost respect and recognition for their tireless service for Europe.

I cannot talk about Europe without talking about our friends from the **United Kingdom**. For the very first time in 2016 a Member State decided to leave the European Union. This is a serious decision. We regret it, but we respect it. Since then, together with the current government of the United Kingdom, the European Union has worked hard to organise the orderly departure of the United Kingdom.

The Withdrawal Agreement concluded with the government of the United Kingdom provides certainty where Brexit created uncertainty: in preserving the rights of citizens and in preserving peace and stability on the island of Ireland. These two priorities are mine, too.

However, I stand ready for a **further extension of the withdrawal date**, should more time be required for a good reason. In any case, the United Kingdom will remain our ally, our partner and our friend.

A new push for European democracy

Honourable Members,

When I came to Strasbourg 13 days ago, I promised I'd come to listen. I have heard your concerns, your hopes and your expectations. The Political Guidelines which I will send you today reflect our discussions. From what I have heard, I have drawn my conclusions and I have made my decisions.

First, **I want European citizens to play a leading and active part in building the future of our Union**. I want them to have their say at a **Conference on the Future of Europe**, to start in 2020 and run for two years.

Second, **I want us to work together to improve the Spitzenkandidaten system**. We need to make it more visible to the wider electorate and we need to address the issue of transnational lists at the European elections as a complementary tool of European democracy.

And third – yes, **I support a right of initiative for the European Parliament**. When this House, acting by majority of its Members, adopts Resolutions requesting the Commission to submit legislative proposals, I commit to responding with a legislative act in full respect of the proportionality, subsidiarity, and better law-making principles.

I am convinced that our stronger partnership will further help to make people's voices heard.

Europas Versprechen

Herr Präsident,

Mein Vater war 15 Jahre alt, als der schaurige Krieg, durch den mein Land Tod, Verwüstung, Vertreibung und Zerstörung über unseren Kontinent gebracht hat, endete.

Er hat seinen Kindern, mir und meinen 6 Geschwistern, oft davon erzählt. Er hat vor allem davon erzählt, was es für ihn bedeutet hat, dass die anderen Länder uns wieder die Hand gereicht haben, und uns in den Kreis der demokratischen Völker zurückgenommen haben. Er hat bei der Montan-Union angefangen und uns anfangs gesagt: *Wir treiben wieder Handel miteinander und wenn man Handel treibt, dann entstehen Freundschaften und Freunde schießen nicht aufeinander.*

Er war Kabinettschef bei von der Groeben in der Hallstein Kommission und später Generaldirektor für Wettbewerbsfragen. **Deshalb bin ich in Brüssel geboren und Europäerin gewesen, bevor ich später gelernt habe, dass ich Deutsche bin und Niedersächsin. Und deshalb gibt es für mich nur eines: Europa einen und stärken.**

Wer mit mir dieses Europa stärken, wachsen und blühen lassen will, hat mich als leidenschaftliche Kämpferin an seiner oder ihrer Seite. Wer aber dieses Europa schwächen, spalten oder ihm seine Werte nehmen will, der findet in mir eine erbitterte Gegnerin.

Als mein Vater alt und an seinem Lebensende war, da hatte sich seine Erzählung von Europa verändert. Er sprach nicht mehr so viel vom Krieg. Er sagte: *Europa ist wie eine lange Ehe. Die Liebe wird nicht größer als am ersten Tag, aber sie wird tiefer.* Weil wir wissen, dass wir uns aufeinander verlassen können, in guten wie in schweren Zeiten. Weil wir wissen, dass wir streiten, aber uns wieder versöhnen können. Weil wir nie vergessen, warum wir diesen Bund eingegangen sind.

Wir hier alle in diesem Raum leben in einem Europa, das gewachsen ist, gereift ist, das stark geworden ist mit 500 Millionen Einwohnern. Über 200 Millionen Menschen sind zur Wahl gegangen. Dieses Europa hat Einfluss. Es will Verantwortung übernehmen für sich und diese Welt.

Das ist nicht immer leicht – das weiß ich – das ist schmerzhaft und anstrengend, aber es ist unsere nobelste Pflicht! Die Menschen wollen sehen, dass wir liefern, vorankommen. Die Jugend fordert das. Meine Kinder sagen mir zu Recht: *Spielt nicht auf Zeit, sondern macht was draus.*

Dazu bin ich angetreten. Dazu brauche ich Ihre Hilfe und Unterstützung. Dazu rufe ich alle Europäerinnen und Europäer auf, mitzumachen. Es ist das Kostbarste, was wir haben: **Es lebe Europa, vive l'Europe, long live Europe.**

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