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Keynote Speech

**“Europe is facing enormous challenges –
We can only overcome them together.”**

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Overview

I. Challenges

II. Examples

1. a dictatorial China
2. authoritarian regimes within the EU
3. poverty, war and migration

III. How we move forward

1. joint European discussions
2. European solidarity
3. joint decision-making

IV. Europe is strong and miracles happen

Dear Europeans,

I too would like to welcome you most warmly. I'm delighted to be giving a brief ten-minute introductory talk. The topic is:

“Europe is facing enormous challenges –

We can only overcome them together”

I can only scratch the surface of this topic. Please accept my apologies in advance for all the omissions and shortcomings.

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I. Challenges

The world is facing gigantic challenges. That is why Europe is also facing gigantic challenges. And all of these challenges are interrelated. They are all threats: they threaten to destroy the world as we know it:

- When it comes to epidemics, it is being brought home to us right now: Europe and the world are in a corona lockdown.
- We are literally facing hell with the climate catastrophe: Europe is facing increasing droughts, unbearable heat, floods, the decimation of insects and animals and much more.
- In terms of finances, we experienced it in and after 2008. Such a crisis could return in the context of the looming economic crisis: many states have very high debts and many citizens have high debts.
- Worldwide poverty and inequality are causing the flow of refugees to expand, millions have no future in their homeland: many are stranded at the border to Europe.
- Increasing nationalism and protectionism are strangling the economy.
- Europe is completely dependent on Facebook and Co. or China. Our Online Citizens' Meeting is the best example: the video platform Zoom is a US corporation; the servers are in China. Censorship in China could lead to our meeting simply being switched off at any moment.
- Dictatorial and authoritarian systems are on the rise again; people seek salvation from a strong leader; democracies are "sounding their retreat".
- The arms race is picking up speed again and wars are breaking out.
- Terrorism and organised crime are destroying civilian structures that are essential for a functioning economy and state and our welfare.

All these threats and crises have one thing in common: they do not stop at borders. They cannot be solved nationally, but only in cooperation and collectively. Europe must therefore be strong. That is why we must strengthen and reform the European Union.

II. Examples

I would like to elaborate on three areas of these threats or examples.

1. A dictatorial China

Communist China is, in my opinion, strategically the greatest challenge. China is the largest country in the world with 1.4 billion people. The communist leadership has set itself the goal of becoming the technological world leader within the next 5 to 10 years ("Made in China 2025"). China applies for the most patents worldwide. With the Silk Road Project ("Belt and Road Initiative"), the Chinese leadership is gaining global infrastructural dominance. It is establishing its global economic hegemony through a global buyout and credit programme for developing and emerging countries. It has been conducting a gigantic rearmament programme for years. Domestically, it has installed an

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electronic monitoring system of undreamt-of dimensions. Millions of people are locked up without trial. China is brutally suppressing any form of democratisation.

China is neither a democracy nor a constitutional state. That is the core problem. In essence, the doctrine of the "dictatorship of the proletariat", that is, the dictatorship of the Communist Party leadership, applies. Since: the dictatorship of the proletariat means that the leadership is not bound by any laws. This also means, however, that structurally there can be no trust in the Chinese leadership.

The countries of Europe are dependent on China in many ways: through exports, by creating added value in China, through investments, loans. This makes us vulnerable to blackmail.

The threat posed by China's communist leadership can only be overcome by Europe pulling together. Any one country alone is far too small and too weak. We need a common EU-China strategy and China policy.

This means, among other things, that we need to

- develop a common perception of the problem,
- pursue a common strategic technology policy,
- formulate a shared human rights policy.

It is important that we Europeans demonstrate solidarity and a willingness to make sacrifices. For it may well be that we must be prepared to pay an economic price for human rights and democratic independence. After all, we are today economically dependent on China to a considerable extent: Volkswagen, for example, sells 40 percent of its cars in China. If we are not prepared to make sacrifices, we are open to blackmail.

Solidarity also means, for example, that we must help Greece and the countries of Eastern Europe, among other things, to build a modern infrastructure and not to become dependent on China. Unfortunately, this is already partly the case: the strategically important port of Piraeus in Greece belongs to China (shipping company COSCOS).

2. Authoritarian regimes within the EU

Democracy is also coming under increasing pressure within the EU. Right-wing populist and völkisch/fascist parties are becoming stronger and are spreading.

Particularly in Poland and Hungary, the dismantling of the rule of law and freedom of opinion in the media is well advanced. The courts are no longer independent.

In Hungary, Prime Minister Orbán governs largely without accountability under an Empowerment/Enabling Act. He engages in openly anti-Semitic propaganda. He uses the stylistic devices of the National Socialist smear campaign of the NSDAP militant publication "Der Stürmer".

In order to drive back these illiberal tendencies, the democrats in Europe must stand by the democrats in Poland and Hungary. At the same time, we must enter into a European dialogue with the supporters and voters of the Polish ruling party PiS and the Hungarian ruling party Fidesz and other illiberal parties in order to convince them. The EU and EU countries must impose sanctions on breaches of the rule of law in Poland and Hungary through treaty violation procedures and budgetary planning.

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3. Poverty, war and migration

Europe is a pawn in the game of world powers and other agents. This can be seen in Syria, West Africa, Sahel Africa and Eastern Europe.

The Arab Spring was brutally crushed in Syria in 2011 by the Syrian dictator Assad assisted by Russia's ruler Putin. Europe has watched on helplessly, as it does not pursue a unified foreign, security and defence policy.

This has led to the inferno of the Syrian civil war, the reign of terror of the IS and the misery of millions of refugees. Europe found itself once again helplessly at the mercy of this, as it is not pursuing a uniform refugee and asylum policy. Relatively few countries bear the burden of refugees and are left alone by others.

Terrorism is gaining ground in the Sahel and parts of West Africa. We are threatened with state collapse and refugee movements on an unprecedented scale. What is needed is massive security aid - including military aid - for these countries and a huge development programme to combat the causes of flight sustainably. To this end, the countries of Europe must not abandon France, which has been the country that has been most active to date. A strategic EU development policy is necessary.

Putin is pursuing an aggressive arms and war policy on the edges of the EU. This poses a threat to everyone, but especially to the EU's Baltic countries and Poland. This is where a sustainable European defence policy must provide protection and deterrence. Europe may not become dependent on Trump. This also raises the question of how a common European nuclear deterrent can work.

III. How we move forward

The EU, i.e. we Europeans, can tackle the challenges outlined above. To do so, we must unite to form a true European citizenship. For this we must provide three essential things:

1. Joint European discussions

We must gain a common perception of the problem. This will only succeed if we do not have national discussions about Europe. We must not talk about each other; we must talk with each other. We need Europeans discussing with Europeans from different countries, discussing European topics with each other. Today we are taking the first step.

2. European solidarity

A great many political solutions require solidarity among Europeans. This is exemplified by the public debt crisis after 2008, the refugee crisis since 2015 and now the Corona economic crisis in 2020.

How is solidarity born? Solidarity is created through trust. Trust is created through encounters between individual Europeans across national borders. We must therefore organise mass, intensive European meetings: digitally and in real life. Here too, we are taking a first step today.

3. Joint decision-making

We must decide on European issues together. Everyone must be able to participate in this process. That is why we must complement European democracy with procedures for European citizens' petitions and public decisions.

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European Citizens' Online Discussion**

IV. Europe is strong and miracles happen!

Europe must join forces. That will make us very strong.

The sporting strength of Europe symbolises this well. Viewed individually - each country on its own - we Europeans are only mediocre. Together, however, nobody can beat us. This is shown, for example, by the medal table at the Olympic Games. When united, we outperform the USA and China by far: at the 2016 Summer Games we won 106 gold medals, the USA only 46 and China only 26.

The tasks are huge and apparently miracles have to happen. But they can happen. Almost exactly 75 years ago to the day, World War II ended. The world was liberated from National Socialist Germany. The fact that we now, as Europeans and democrats from countries that were enemies for centuries, are together in friendship and are building a common Europe, is proof of this: miracles happen.

We just have to hang on in there and keep going. Then we can do it!

Long live united Europe!

Vive l'Europe unie !

Niech żyje zjednoczona Europa!

Es lebe das Vereinte Europa!