

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr Speaker,

On 11 November, Ukraine liberated Kherson. Ukraine's flag is now flying over the city, side-by-side with the EU flag. Metre by metre, Ukrainian men and women have reclaimed their country, and their freedom.

Yesterday, two people were killed in Poland near the Ukrainian border. An investigation is under way, and NATO and Sweden are following developments closely. In times of crisis, a government must keep a cool head, and a warm heart.

Arising from the ruins of the Second World War, the EU has been, and will continue to be, defined by crisis: the financial crisis, the euro crisis, the migration crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic.

And now a new bloody war in Europe, and a European energy crisis brought on by that war. Crisis management is a necessary core competency. But the long-term approach is as important now as it was prior to the invasion. It is essential that we are able to hold not only two, but several, thoughts in our heads at once.

On 1 January, Sweden takes over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The new Government and I will then lead the work to build on the EU's many strengths – but also improve Europe in areas where the EU is not currently strong enough. In December, I will return to present the priorities for the Swedish Presidency. But there are four critical issues for Europe that I would like to raise already.

The first of these is Europe's security – both internal security and external security.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine reminds us that freedom and democracy must not be taken for granted. Might does not make right. Russia's invasion is an attack on Ukraine, but also on all the values that Europe stands for. The Ukrainian soldiers in Kherson, in Kharkiv and Sloviansk are not only defending their own country and freedom, they are also defending Europe's freedom.

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A few weeks ago, 26 of my colleagues and I listened to President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky's address to the European Council. He spoke about the continuation of the Russian terror, as it uses energy as a deadly weapon. Ukraine's electrical system is being destroyed through warfare that clearly targets the civilian population.

Yesterday evening, I spoke with Mr Zelensky on the phone and informed him of the contents of Sweden's new support package to Ukraine. It will be the most extensive military support to date, more than all the previous support combined. The package is based on both what Ukraine expressed a need for, and what Sweden can temporarily do without. It will also encompass the greatest humanitarian aid to date.

Since the invasion, the EU has demonstrated strong unity. Those who say the EU doesn't get anything done are wrong. Sweden will do everything it can to preserve this unity and continue to increase sanctions against Putin's regime. The EU will continue to support Ukraine so that it can win this war, by providing it with political, economic, military and humanitarian support.

We need a new Marshall Plan. Just as Germany was raised out of the ruins of the Second World War, so too will we now work to raise Ukraine out of the rubble, brick by brick. Sweden welcomes Ukraine's status as candidate country, and we will build on the progress that Ukraine has made in its preparations for EU membership.

The war gives rise to greater geopolitical realism. The Government aims to enhance Sweden's role in EU defence and security policy. The EU's role is to complement NATO – not compete with it. The Government and I strongly believe that Europe must assume greater responsibility for both European and transatlantic security.

And cooperation must also be enhanced and deepened to increase Europe's internal security. Without a strong external border, internal movement is threatened. That's why we need better border controls, and increased police cooperation. To preserve freedom of movement within the EU, the external border must be respected.

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The second critical issue is the climate transition. The new Government views the EU as Sweden's most important climate policy forum – and as one of the world's most important climate actors.

We are constantly reminded of how serious this is. Extreme weather, flooding, rising temperatures... The World Meteorological Organization recently showed that temperatures are rising faster in Europe than on any other continent. Since 1991, temperatures have increased here by more than twice the global average. The goal of making Europe the world's first carbon-neutral continent by 2050 remains in place.

It is therefore essential to see not only the threat, but also hope. When I attended the COP27 Climate Change Conference in Egypt last week, the message I heard both from climate researchers and from Swedish companies was the same: the transition is necessary, but it is an opportunity, not an obstacle. For this reason, the new Government says yes to ambitious climate goals for the business sector, but no to policies that restrict innovative capacity.

Careful considerations must be made when interests conflict with each other. Forests are one example, where the new Government demands that the EU give full consideration to the role that forests play – as an energy source, as a base for sustainable products and as an economic engine. But also as a carbon sink and a breeding ground for biodiversity.

This will create new green jobs in Europe. And Sweden can show the way. LKAB, SSAB, Boliden and Northvolt are not only Swedish pioneers, they are European giants in the green growth engine. And new companies are turning up all the time. In six years, electric flights between Stockholm and Visby will become reality through the Gothenburg-based company Heart Aerospace. It was inspiring to meet with representatives of the business sector at COP27, and my Government intends to cooperate closely with the new environmental movement.

For the transition to be possible, a new European energy policy is needed. Because the climate begins and ends with the energy issue. Fossil energy from coal, oil and gas must be relegated to the history books. We say no to it for climate-related reasons, but also for security policy reasons.

Heavily expanded energy production based on nuclear, wind, solar and hydrogen energy in

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combination with hydroelectric power will make us completely fossil-free. Sweden respects every country determining its own energy policy, but it will now become a strong proponent of developing European nuclear energy. Together with countries such as France and Finland, we can provide more fossil-free electricity to a robust energy union.

Mr Speaker,

The third critical issue concerns Europe's competitiveness – the prerequisite for growth and welfare, but also for the climate transition. It is worrying that the EU is falling behind Asia and the United States in key economic areas. The global tech industry is currently being advanced on the west coast of the US and on the east coast of China.

For this reason, the single market must be deepened, the digital single market realised and new free trade agreements concluded.

Openness is the basis of growth policy. But the EU's capacity must simultaneously increase in strategic areas where there are obvious vulnerabilities in the supply chain. This can take place through increased internal production or increased trade possibilities. Openness must not mean unilateral dependence, much less naivety. This also entails opportunities for Swedish businesses, from unique minerals to sustainable forestry products.

Innovation and research are the economy's long-term engine. Some of the world's most important inventions are European, and an extraordinary number of them are Swedish. But the EU is currently spending significantly less on research and development than the US, Japan and South Korea. It is essential to increase investments so that European businesses can assert themselves in global competition. Europe must attract talented people for industry for the future, not export them. An initial step is for the EU Member States to meet the EU objective of investing three per cent of GDP in research and development.

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The EU is not only a political union. It is a community of values that rests on the rule of law and respect for the rights and freedoms of the individual. The EU thus preserves part of our European heritage of ideas, from the Enlightenment to the present day. Preserving this heritage is the fourth critical issue.

The EU cannot and must not tolerate individual states violating the fundamental principles of freedom. Member States that limit media freedom, judicial independence or the rights of LGBTIQ people will meet Swedish resistance. Sweden will continue to prioritise the EU's right to make payments of EU funds conditional on respect for the rule of law.

Sweden will remain a strong voice for all LGBTIQ people's right to live as registered partners throughout the EU, and a strong voice against antisemitism.

Fundamental rights and freedoms are not just being questioned here in the EU. At global level, authoritarian states are growing in power and influence. They are advancing their positions within international organisations.

Generally accepted definitions of human rights are being revised to suit dictatorships. And in Africa, a cynical game of chess is being played with the aim of curbing democracy.

For these reasons, the EU must become a stronger global actor. This will be evident in a stronger EU focus of Swedish foreign policy. It is often through the EU that we can protect Sweden's core interests and Swedish values, and act jointly to counter the causes of migration.

A single European voice is needed in relations with China. Each individual country's voice is weak, but China listens when the EU speaks as one. This is why the EU-China strategy, tools to limit China's influence on sensitive technology and joint action when China violates human rights are necessary. In its relations with China, Sweden will work for increased consensus between the US and Europe.

At the same time, dialogue with China is necessary – not least with respect to climate change. The climate change issue begins and ends with the energy issue, but climate change also begins and ends with China.

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Time and again, the EU has demonstrated its capacity to manage crises. But this task extends beyond permanent crisis management. Political values and political will define our long-term successes.

The EU means peace. It means reconciliation on a continent marked by war.

The EU means trade, free movement and economic cooperation.

The EU means people coming together. International exchange students, tourists travelling freely. Mobile phones without roaming charges.

The EU means cultural community and diversity. From ancient mythology to Gothic cathedrals to Nordic folktales. The EU is an organisation, but also a continent. Sweden has the particular task of preserving cooperation with the United Kingdom following Brexit.

In my Government, we see all the possibilities of a stronger EU, one that does the right things. We will face inadequacy, divisiveness and inability with composure and determination.

Sweden has too often been marginalised at the negotiating table in Brussels – entered with too little, too late and insufficiently engaged. The result has been too many legislative proposals that are poorly suited to Sweden's conditions. The issue of wage formation is one example, the misjudgement of the European Pillar of Social Rights another. The new Government will consider all aspects of EU policy. Not to turn all policy into EU policy, but to make the EU better where necessary, and leave national and local policy alone.

We will build strong alliances with countries that share this vision. The Nordic-Baltic region is an obvious platform for this. Together, our countries are stronger.

Mr Speaker,

Europe finds itself in a dark age. History is casting its shadow over us. Russian shells are raining down on Ukrainian cities. But Europe has managed before. Our journey from the trenches to economic and political cooperation are an example to the world. In liberated Kherson, the EU flag now flies next to the blue and yellow Ukrainian flag.

This is why the European journey must continue. For the sake of peace, for the sake of freedom and for the sake of Ukraine.

Thank you.