SPEECH BY EMMANUEL MACRON, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC AT EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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I am very pleased and honoured to answer your invitation, Mr President, to come and, as you said a few moments ago, freely discuss the situation of our Europe in a very specific context.

Our discussion will take place in a context which can only increase our responsibility. A context which is first and foremost one of divisions and sometimes of doubt within Europe. A context where Brexit continues to be debated and worked on – I would like to take the opportunity to commend the work carried out by Michel Barnier over the last few months – but that is also a context where doubt has been seeded in several European countries and which, month after month, has brought out sensibilities which call into question things which we used to see as fundamentals.

A context where a sort of European civil war is reappearing, where our differences, sometimes our national egoisms, appear more important than what unites us within a global context. A context where fascination with illiberalism – and this is something I would like to come back to later – is growing by the day. A context where geopolitical threats – and we will definitely come back to this during our discussion – give Europe a responsibility which grows day by day. A context of large-scale international conflict, from the Levant to the Sahel, but also the emergence of major authoritarian powers and a clear strategy to challenge the framework of multilateralism where Europe played a full role and which was also the framework not only for European influence but also for the construction of European peace.

This time therefore gives us a very special responsibility. We cannot pretend that our discussions are in some way ordinary. This is the time leading up to the forthcoming European elections, where we must fight for the ideals which constructed us. To start our discussion, I would simply like to share two strong convictions with you.

The first is that deciding to abandon our commitment to democracy, and all that goes with it in Europe, is the wrong path to take. The second is that, within this framework, we can, and must, build a new European sovereignty by the means of which we will provide a clear and firm response to our fellow citizens that, yes, we can protect them and provide a response to this global disorder.

I firmly believe that European democracy is our best chance in this world at this difficult time. Abandoning our model, and I would go as far as to say our identity, would be the worst mistake. Here in Strasbourg, as in Brussels, you bring democracy in Europe to life, as Tocqueville spoke about. Our identity is first and foremost a democracy which respects the individual, minority, fundamental rights, which go by the name which I shall assert once again: “liberal democracy”.

I do not wish to let this fatal illusion take hold once again, which has, lest we forget, especially here, pushed our continent towards the abyss. The illusion of strong power, nationalism and the abandonment of freedoms. And I reject this idea which is taking hold even in Europe that democracy is condemned to weakness. Faced with the authoritarianism which surrounds us on all sides, the answer must not be authoritarian democracy but the authority of democracy.

Because this freedom emancipates and protects the individual, a Parliament such as this, your parliament, our parliament, is a European miracle. Peacefully bringing together the elected representatives of the peoples of Europe to discuss their differences, empowered by and conscious of their history and that which has sometimes divided them, is unique in the world. We have kept this miracle alive for 70 years. We must not take it for granted.

Where else in the world do we have the same standards for the economy, geopolitics, diplomacy and military matters, but also for the respect of minorities, freedom of thought, gender equality and respect for privacy? And where else can we find the same vitality and strength?

There are divisions between the countries even within this amphitheatre, but beyond these divisions, this democratic model brings us together and is unique in the world. Europe’s identity goes beyond a freedom-conscious democracy, it is a culture found nowhere else in the world which combines this passion for freedom, the taste for equality, the attachment to diverse and different ideas, languages and landscapes.

To revive the Europe of peoples, we must accept to take a different route by drawing upon democracy as a source and looking at things as they are: how can we be satisfied with European elections where less than half the citizens go and vote? So let us use this coming year to build a genuine, structured debate about convictions and proposals. We cannot afford to do as we did in the past, refusing to talk about Europe, distributing positions and accusing Brussels or Strasbourg of being the source of all ills. If we continue to do this, we accept a series of smokescreens which may be more comfortable for each one of us, but does not resolve a single problem. Like you, I believe in the nobility and complexity of democratic choices.

As representatives of the people of Europe, you are the incarnation of all choices, you make choices every day, reach agreements and forge solutions, because you have a mandate from the people. It is our shared duty to breathe life into this European democracy which is still, at the end of the day, so young.

This is why, ahead of the elections and within the narrow timeframe imposed by the electoral campaigns, we must bring this debate to life, create this public European space which we have so often neglected. It is in this spirit of experimentation and innovation that I have proposed to hold citizens’ consultations starting this year.

The second conviction that I would quickly like to share with you, is the need for European sovereignty. To defend the European idea is not to defend an abstract idea, some sort of dilution of our own individual sovereignty, but it is to act in the faith that faced with such great global changes, such large-scale transformations, this time in which we are living, we need a sovereignty which is stronger than our own, which works alongside our own and does not replace it, as only this sovereignty can provide the right answers to large-scale migration, global insecurity and economic, social and environmental transformations. This is the European sovereignty which I believe in.

You have made a lot of progress on this issue and I would like to congratulate you. But before the end of this parliament in spring 2019, we must achieve tangible results on several fronts. We must make progress on migration by getting the ball rolling on the poisoned Dublin Regulation debate and the issue of relocation, but also by going beyond this debate and building the external and internal solidarity that our Europe needs. I therefore suggest the creation of a European programme which directly and financially supports local authorities which welcome and integrate refugees.

The second issue is that of digital taxation, following the Commission’s proposal to create a short-term tax which puts an end to the most shocking of excesses. I support this proposal, it is much needed and will also, I hope, help to open up possibilities of own resources for the forthcoming budget.

The reform of the Economic and Monetary Union is a third key front to tackle before the end of this term, by defining a roadmap to enable us to advance step by step on the banking union and establish a budgetary capacity to promote stability and convergence in the eurozone.

Lastly, what keeps us together is not merely a currency or a treaty, it is a sense of belonging, or a culture if you like, and there is much that I could talk about because the implementation of European universities which are genuinely making progress, or the roll-out of Erasmus is essential, but I would like to focus on one of your ongoing projects, which I believe is essential, the project on copyright, creator protection and artistic creation. This abundance which feeds our societies is the cultural mix without which Europe would no longer be a continent of diversity and creativity.

Confronted with all the current tensions with certain neighbours such as Russia, Europe has shown a front of unity and sovereignty. We need to continue this work.

I believe in this economic sovereignty which is achieved by competitiveness created by reforms in each State, by vital solidarity which we must father develop within the Economic and Monetary Union, and by a more realistic trade policy which we must continue.

Sovereignty also covers climate and energy sovereignty. This is key. We must quickly open the debate to increase the European Union’s contribution under the Paris Agreement. We are currently finalizing discussions on the climate and energy package, but it is clear that we must start a new chapter. Many of you are already involved in this and I hope that in the coming months we will be able to reopen the debate on a carbon price floor. France will put forward the idea of a minimum price and it will support the idea of a border tax for CO₂. Far from being a technical whim or a technical instrument, this is a necessary condition for a credible energy transition.

I would like to welcome the work which has gone in to it. This is exactly what a protective and effective Europe is about. We must continue to build these European sovereignties. They must be at the core of a coherent project and they must underpin the philosophy of the forthcoming Multiannual Financial Framework. I would like to end on this point, this budget that we will discuss must embody a coherent, effective and unified political project.

I’m sure you will have understood, ladies and gentlemen, that I believe that the European Parliament is the seat of Europe’s legitimacy, its responsibility and thus its vitality. Part of Europe’s future is in your hands, Europe as a hub for our sovereignty achieved through and with an even larger sovereignty, the sovereignty which unites us.

I belong to a generation which has never experienced war and I belong to a generation which is allowing itself the luxury of forgetting what its forebears lived through. Many people today believe that we can continue to favour the usual confrontations, the certitudes of the past, because we are used to them, the well known and well organized divisions. But I also belong to a region and a family which has seen the bloodshed of our past. So the choice is simple, I don’t want to belong to a generation of sleepwalkers, I don’t want to be part of a generation which has forgotten its own past and which refuses to face up to the problems of its own present. Over time, everyone will accept their responsibilities, but I want to be part of a generation which has firmly decided to defend its democracy, because democracy is not just some worn-out word which we take for granted, it is a word which still has its full meaning, because it is the fruit of past battles.

I want to belong to a generation which will defend European sovereignty because we fought for it, because it means something and because it is this sovereignty which will enable future generations to choose their own futures. I will not yield to any fascination for authoritarian sovereignties, I will not yield to any current temptations, I believe that together, our responsibility for the coming months is to organize a proper European debate, to have a genuine European agenda, as this is the only way to enable our people to choose, those who want a Europe which no longer puts forward new ideas, those who want an inward-looking Europe, those who want a Europe with the same routines or those who are willing to support an ambitious Europe with renewed sovereignty, a living democracy, the one that we believe in. Thank you very much.