



Discours au Collège d'Europe à Bruges dans la cadre du Programme diplomatique européen

Bruges, le 29 septembre 2022

Dear diplomats, dear young colleagues, dear Federica,

It is a pleasure and an honor to address you - the future players in European diplomacy - in this prestigious college, in times that demand a firmer unity among us Europeans than ever. All things first, I would like to congratulate you for being the pioneers of this groundbreaking program, and the College of Europe for having the honor to implement it. Make the best out of it!

18 years ago, I took up my functions as Foreign Minister of Luxembourg. That was just a couple of months after a certain Sergei Lavrov did in his country. I have met Mr. Lavrov many times. We have had interesting discussions, although he has never been an easy interlocutor. I have felt, like many others, a certain respect for the Russian colleague over the years, for his knowledge and his negotiation skills. All of that has been totally washed away after February 24th. The course of events since the start of Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine, seven months ago have shocked me as much as anyone one of us. What's more, the feeling of consternation has been enhanced by a sentiment of deep personal disappointment.

The question is: **what lessons must we draw** from the historic turn that shakes the core of Europe and baffles our security architecture? What must we learn from these developments that reminded us in a brutal way that war could return to our continent we thought was safe from it? 70 years ago, the founders of Europe signed a treaty that is meant to guarantee peace, with the mantra: never again. How can we best anticipate, be prepared and avoid further escalation? And how can we do so using the political framework the European Union provides?



We can't simply accept it as a fatality that wars have existed for thousands of years and that there is no reason for that to change. We had been convinced for years that closer cooperation with the big Russian neighbor, a neighbor that will not go away on the map, would inevitably lead to a firmer bond between the people of our countries and Russia. I still think that constructivism provides the best guidelines in diplomacy – on how to learn from each other, how to build trust, and how to anticipate a future together. What we had not realized, what we couldn't or didn't want to see, is that we have been deceived by a tyrant who follows his personal obsessions without any scruples nor respect for international law and human rights. **It's a cruel wake-up**, that forces us into *Realpolitik* where trust is not possible anymore. **We need to anticipate the worst and figure out together the best reaction** aiming at protecting us, without giving up our values.

And that's exactly what we did, by taking unprecedented decisions from the very first days of the Russian aggression. The EU Member states were unified and quick in adopting packages of sanctions that were unheard of in their scale and depth. Through the European Peace Facility, we bought arms for a country to defend itself at war, for the very first time. I will never forget these first weeks of the Russian aggression; they were by far the worst moments I have experienced in my time as a Foreign Minister. There was shock, consternation, but also the determination not to accept Putin's goals of destruction, and a **very strong sentiment of togetherness.**

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is also a violation of the prohibition on the use of force under Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter. Small countries like Luxembourg are perhaps even more sensible than bigger countries to any violations of international law, because their survival and existence depends on it. Therefore, Luxembourg has from the first day on pleaded in favor of a strong reaction from the international community.

After what they call "partial" mobilization in Russia, we enter a new phase of the war, of which we cannot predict the outcome. One thing is for sure: Putin's move stems from weakness.



The Ukrainian army, in its bravery and courage, has dismantled the myth that Putin is a good strategist, or that the Russian army is invincible. Quite the opposite is true: the disorganized Russian retreat has unveiled several shortcomings among which the most acute is probably the low morale of the Russian troops, in opposition to the Ukrainians. Also, recently in Samarkand, Putin has encountered nuanced resistance in China's and India's leaders, whom he thought would support his war. **The partial mobilization is supposed to be a game changer on the battlefield, but it won't.** The Russian population is in fear, I hear from Moscow that many Russian men are not going out of their houses anymore. The police is everywhere and can hand out mobilization letters to any male. Men as old as 60 are ordered off to the front, so are students. Perversion goes as far as to immediately send off anyone who dares to speak out against the war. Despite of all these risks, people continue to protest and get arrested for their courage of publicly speaking out against the war. You **have heard also about Russian men who are trying to flee.** Planes to countries like Georgia, Serbia or Turkey that allow Russians in without a visa are sold-out or cost up to 18.000 EUR. These people could find their way into Europe at a later stage, even though, for now, direct entries from Russia into the EU are not going up significantly, except in Finland.

Europe opened its doors to millions of Ukrainians fleeing the war, mostly women and children. More than 5000 have come to Luxembourg and found shelter, work and education. In this matter as well, we acted swiftly and in unity, to activate the temporary protection status. I am also Minister in charge of migration and asylum and participate in Justice and Home Affairs Councils, where we acted with the same sense of common purpose than at the Foreign Affairs Council. This is a welcome change from the migration crisis of 2015, when, deplorably, there was no unity when it came to dealing with the migrants in the Mediterranean. I do hope that the spirit of our joint action for Ukraine will also guide us in the necessary overall reform efforts in EU migration policy. **We need more legal pathways to come to Europe,** but finding an agreement on European migration policy remains unlikely.



While it is a bit too early to exactly know the impact of Russian fugitives on our borders, **the next challenge among EU Member states will be to find a way to deal with Russians that flee the mobilization.** There are different, valid arguments among the Member states: those who say that these people represent a risk for national security, that they have not been opposed to the war before mobilization and should therefore not be granted entry; and those who think that we should give a chance to those who do not agree with Putin's way, or who are simply trying to save their lives. I personally think that we should leave a door open, provided that we analyze the requests for either international protection or for visas very carefully, case by case.

In any case, this topic will be a next priority in the EU. The next round of sanctions will also test our unity - have we run out of ideas to continue to impose cost on Putin? Which brings me to the question of how the 27 deal with tricky problems that nobody can see through in their entirety. **So far, I have been very proud of our good cooperation inside the EU bodies,** be it in the working groups, in the Political and Security Committee or in the Council. The crisis has shown that we can take very difficult decisions together in a record time. Legal challenges can be overcome; institutional obstacles can be put aside whenever there is political will. The EU has never been as quick, as strong and as determined, which personally gives me a lot of confidence.

On the other hand, in some cases, we have been forced to dilute our decisions, or we have been slowed down by the opposition of sometimes one single Member state. And I won't hide my worry that, the longer the war in Ukraine lasts, the bigger the risk of an Ukraine fatigue will grow among the European population and inside the Council. **That is why, in a medium and long term, I am in favor of introducing the qualified majority vote (QMV) in some areas of CFSP,** and in particular in the area of human rights.

The Lisbon Treaty's architects have equipped the Treaties with so-called 'passerelle clauses' – provisions aimed at modifying the decision-making of the Council of the EU, switching from



unanimity to qualified majority voting without changing the Treaties. Of course, in order to activate these clauses, you need unanimous agreement among the 27. While I do not believe that qualified majority voting would be a magic solution for all our problems in CFSP, a debate should be held on how to deliver better results for our Union and our citizens. This is also one of the findings of the Conference on the Future of Europe, and a view expressed by many EU residents in the citizen consultations held in this context.

Another option already available, if a Member state does not wish to support a measure, is **constructive abstention**, allowing that Member State to abstain from a unanimous vote without blocking it. When it comes to CSDP more particularly, I am in favor of **article 44** being implemented as soon as possible, as one of the first deliverables of the Strategic compass. It will allow two or more Member states to press ahead in a CSDP mission, provided all the Member states agree on the principle.

Dear students, dear Federica,

Let me end my remarks with something I have personally been fighting for during my entire career and where foreign policy, European affairs and migration intersect. Amidst these conflicted times, **let us not abandon persons who flee war and repression**, be it in Ukraine, Afghanistan, Syria or anywhere in the world. We MUST remember the stories of our ancestors when they were running from Nazi and fascist Europe in the thirties and forties. The EU's roots are based on the lessons we have drawn of this dark episode of our common history. Our European peace project has emerged from it. Let's find ways to host refugees for the time they need shelter. Luxembourg has currently 6.500 beds for people who ask for protection; in a country with a total population of circa 650.000 people that is a record in the EU. While the numbers of people who come to Europe are on the rise again, more often than not through a very risky and dangerous journey, let's enhance legal migration. There are of course many challenges and our common security needs to be preserved, but in the end, compassion with those who have to take enormous risks to flee their homes, makes us what we are: humans altogether. Thank you, and now I look forward to your questions.