



The European Way

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Picture this:

A parent waves goodbye to their kids outside a public school they trust – knowing education is a right, not a privilege. A student takes a train to visit ten countries in a single summer, each with a unique history, culture, architecture – experiencing the beauty and life lessons of diversity. All this without needing a passport or visa. A researcher arrives at a first-class university to collaborate with colleagues from all over the world – pursuing their research free from interference or prescription.

This is not a utopia, nor a distant dream or idealized vision. This is Europe. On a normal Friday like today. And yet, Europe is often described – especially outside of Europe – as a continent in decline, stuck in history, struggling to adapt to a changing world order. Crisis is often the frame through which Europe is discussed, analyzed, and all too often, dismissed.

To that I say: come and see. It is not an argument, it is an invitation. A simple phrase.

- Come and see European societies that remain dynamic without abandoning compassion and solidarity.
- Come and see European innovation that is ambitious yet grounded in responsibility.
- Come and see European economies that pursue growth, while respecting social and ecological limits.

Because where others describe a continent in constant decline, I see continuous progress. Crisis has never been Europe's weakness. It has been its engine. A catalyst, for change, for progress. Two successive World Wars were a human catastrophe, but also the start of the unique European peace project. The stagflation in the 1980s was an economic crisis, but also the start of the Single Market, a unified market of 450 million people. The currency upheavals in the 1990s were a monetary crisis, but also the start of the Euro, a new common currency for twenty-one European countries today.

The European project did not emerge and evolve because circumstances happened to be favorable. It did so, because the alternative became unacceptable and the power of cooperation undeniable.

The European moment

“Today, we are faced with a structural rupture in that relationship. But where others see this as the end of Europe, I see it as our moment to seize.”

We are now living through another period of historical significance, standing at yet another crossroads. Since at least the Marshall Plan, Europe has walked its path towards an ever-closer union in an unwavering alliance with the United States. President John F. Kennedy once captured something essential about Europe’s direction and the transatlantic relationship. He stated that *“the free nations of Europe are moving towards a unity of purpose and power and policy in every sphere of activity. We regard her as a welcome partner, not a rival.”*

And speaking here today, at the Kennedy School of Government, those words feel strikingly current. They remind us that Europe’s strength has always come from choosing cooperation over fragmentation, shared purpose over short-term advantage, and responsibility over retreat.

Today, we are faced with a structural rupture in that relationship. But where others see this as the end of Europe, I see it as our moment to seize. Each time Europe faced challenges, predictions of failure followed. And each time, Europe adapted.

We can do so again by sticking to the same values and principles that have guided us through past periods of change: democracy, stability, freedom. The principles enshrined in the EU Treaties and UN Charter.

The European values

“We recognize that freedom [...] may be absolute for every individual. But, within a society, it must be contingent on respecting the freedom of those with whom we live.”

Europe does not claim perfection – we discuss, we negotiate, we compromise. And yes, it can appear slow. But there is a reason for this approach: a political culture shaped by a collective memory, cautious of simplistic answers and mindful of consequences.



Since the end of the second World War, stability, for us in Europe, has never meant the absence of discussions, but the ability to manage disagreement without violence, to transform difference into dialogue. Compromise is encouraged, not shunned. That is why the European Union may appear slower, but it is sturdier. It bends, but it does not break. Our democracies correct themselves because dissent is allowed.

Come and see.

In a world that is increasingly tempted by simplicity, Europe remains realistic: reality itself is complex. Honest solutions will be as well.

- Yes, we want technological progress, but it must serve humanity.
- Yes, we want economic growth, but it must respect planetary limits.
- Yes, we want security, but not at the expense of freedom, trust, and social cohesion.

This constant negotiation between different objectives takes time, but it makes our decisions lasting and predictable. This is Europe's soft power in its truest sense – not merely the influence of institutions or norms, but trust and credibility earned through a track record of transparent and commonsense decisions. Decisions that stick.

And in a fragmented world, this soft power may be the most powerful of all. In this new world, power is too often measured in terms of dominance, success in speed, and progress in disruption.

Europe measures power differently. Not just by what wins, but by what holds. Partnerships have value; they are not just transactional relationships. Economies are steered to serve the long-term wellbeing of the population and planet; they are not left unchecked to pursue short-term financial gain.

Come and see.

We recognize that freedom, too, is complex. The freedom of speech, of religion, of political participation are principles. But in Europe, we know that it is not that easy. These freedoms may be absolute for every individual. But, within a society, they must be contingent on respecting the freedoms of those with whom we live.



- You may speak freely, but you cannot degrade another person's dignity.
- You may pray freely, but you cannot discriminate based on belief.
- You may vote freely, but you cannot otherwise seek to interfere in elections.

This European understanding of freedom is rooted in history – a history that taught the cost of deliberate exclusion, the danger of silencing voices, and the consequences of unchecked power.

Freedom of expression is protected because Europeans know, from experience, what happens when it disappears. But freedom of expression is not limitless either. Because Europeans know, from experience too, what happens when you abuse that right to incite hatred based on race and religion. That is why education plays such a crucial role. In Europe, it is not only understood as training for employment, but as preparation for citizenship, for coming of age and for taking on responsibility.

Come and see.

These values and principles are the foundation on which Europe stands and on which we can build its future. And yet, like I said before, I do not claim that Europe is perfect the way it is. So, what are the next steps we can, and must, take in this moment of change? Where can we adapt without abandoning our European values? How do we take the next big step in European integration?

I see three areas: the economy, energy and defence.

The European economic future

“Europeans dared. And Europeans succeeded. I want us to dare again. Because I want us to succeed again.”

Our top priority must be our economic success. Because it is the basis for our welfare, and it generates the wealth to deal with all other challenges. In Europe, the economy is not an end in itself, it is the condition that allows the European way of life to prosper. Growth built by healthy, educated, safe people is not only more humane, it is more durable.

And the European Union has many economic strengths to offer: an integrated market of 450 million citizens, with high purchasing power, a dense web of infrastructure, and top-class universities.

And in this current uncertain transition between two periods, where the rules of the “old” system no longer apply, but those of the “new” system have not yet taken shape, Europe has another strategic asset: its reliability and predictability. You cannot put a number on it. But workers and businesses alike know its value. And yet, over the years, this predictability has also made us somewhat comfortable and risk averse. This was not always the case.

Most breakthrough innovations over the past centuries have been European: the steam engine, cars and jet engine; vaccines, x-rays and coronary bypasses; radio, TV and the internet.

Europeans dared. And Europeans succeeded. I want us to dare again. Because I want us to succeed again. A changed risk culture can re-ignite the European growth engine.

- Research and innovation must be boosted through bold developments in new technologies, like artificial intelligence and quantum.
- The Single Market must be revived through a renewed spirit of entrepreneurship.
- The Savings and Investment Union – a unified European capital market – must finally become a reality through a different approach to investing – using European money to finance European success.

The European energy future

“In an uncertain world, energy is a question of sovereignty. We cannot continue to rely on others for our energy supply.”

The second European priority at this point in time must be energy. It is the fundamental driver of economies – from fueling industrial factories and lighting up offices to enabling communication and powering data centers.

And in an uncertain world, energy is a question of sovereignty. We cannot continue to rely on others for our energy supply. Our dependence on Russian gas became a strategic vulnerability and we should avoid creating new ones.

That is why we must expand our own energy production and build a truly European energy market where power flows freely across borders. Solar panels in Portugal could power Luxembourg. Hydrogen from the North Sea could power Italy. And wind farms in Sweden could power Germany.

Europe is attempting – imperfectly, but deliberately – to align economic growth with environmental responsibility. That too, is part of the distinctly European way of life. These choices reflect a sense of duty towards future generations, towards other regions of the world, and towards the planet itself.

The European defence future

“A wide-ranging discussion about the future of NATO is inevitable. It is about making a conscious choice on reducing our dependency and establishing a balanced relationship.”

A third priority in this changed world must be to build up Europe’s defence capacity – not to intimidate our neighbors, but to deter potential aggressors. That is the sad reality, when international law can no longer guarantee security. We cannot abandon our support for international institutions, but we need to be able to back up our principles with a credible defence.

Russia’s unjustified invasion of Ukraine was a wake-up call for Europe in that sense. A lot of changes have been set in motion to improve readiness and interoperability. But those efforts need more urgency and a new discussion on our strategic objective.

A wide-ranging discussion about the future of NATO is inevitable. It is not about cutting off our bonds with the United States. It is about making a conscious choice on reducing our dependency and establishing a balanced relationship. That is why, Europe is taking over responsibility for its own continent – preferably within NATO.

But we also need to reconsider the idea of a European army – not for the immediate future but dismissing it out of hand would be a mistake too. The fact that it failed in the past should not be a reason for us to not try again. And even if it will not be possible in the short term to make one big jump, we can move forward step by step.

I strongly believe that we can achieve all of this.

Come and see.

The European way

"We choose – again and again – cooperation over isolation, law over force, dialogue over division – not because it is easy, but because it works."

Every day, people from around the world make a deliberate decision to study, to work, and to stay in Europe. They come because Europe holds an immense power of attraction. In Europe, you can raise your family in a safe environment and offer your children high-quality education. Work is valued, but life is not postponed. Students and researchers are free to explore ideas without political interference, financial fear or ideological constraint.

Now, why does this matter – here, today, at Harvard? Because we are in a new world where the rules are challenged. In this world, Europe has something to offer: it is proof that a good life is possible and that cooperation can work, that multilateralism can work – when it is anchored in law, institutions, and accountability.

Many of you will go into tech, finance, diplomacy, law, politics. In every one of those fields, the question is the same: do you want to build a career with purpose, aiming to improve the world based on shared values? Do you want to build systems that concentrate power – or systems that distribute trust?

Europe's leadership in a changing world will not be defined by domination, but by demonstration – by showing that open societies can remain secure, that free markets can remain fair, and that political pluralism can remain peaceful.

We choose – again and again – cooperation over isolation, law over force, dialogue over division – not because it is easy, but because it works. And because it is more durable for society as a whole in the long run. And we will work with anyone who is ready to engage on those terms. Not from a position of moral superiority, but from a deep understanding of the consequences of our past moral failure.

- Because we saw where unchecked nationalism leads to, we know the power of cooperation.
- Because we saw the cost of division, we know the strength of unity.
- Because we saw the danger of silence, we know the value of dialogue.

Crises do not only destroy. They reveal. They show what is essential, what endures, and who we are.

So, to those who are skeptical about Europe's future, I offer not an argument, but an invitation: come and see.

- Come and see European cities built for people, not cars.
- Come and see European universities where ideas matter more than backgrounds.
- Come and see European energy networks being revamped from fossil fuels to renewable sources.
- Come and see European societies that invest not only in markets, but in meaning.

The question is not whether Europe will endure. The question is what more Europe can show the world.

Come and see.