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The collapse of the Soviet Union marked a transformation in the concept of global security. After decades of cold war, a new world order emerged rooted in increased diplomacy and international cooperation. And yet on 24 February 2022, the horrors of war returned to Europe. Putin's tanks rolling into independent and sovereign Ukraine saw the violation of our international principles and signalled Russia's blatant refusal to continue to form part of the rules-based international order. Putin attempted to redefine geopolitics, to polarize the world. Instead, however, he polarized himself and his country. The European Union's response was courageous, firm and united. Putin thought that he would divide us, but instead he drove us closer together. He strengthened our resolve to defend our democratic values and reinforced our efforts in reshaping our European security architecture.

The European Union was adamant: we cannot be *de facto* financing Russia's military aggression on Ukraine. This is why we adopted seven packages of severe sanctions against Russia to weaken its economy and to isolate it within the international sphere. As of July 2022, we have already provided Ukraine with €2.5 billion for military equipment, including for lethal weapons. I am proud that from a humanitarian perspective, we have taken unprecedented action to provide aid to Ukrainian children, women and men. Since the start of the war, our EU Member States and citizens have opened up their borders, their homes and their hearts to 5.5 million Ukrainian people who have been forced to flee from their homes. Complementing this, we have already mobilized €2.2 billion in macro-financial assistance to Ukraine.

The European Parliament was the first institution to call for the granting of EU candidate status to Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and to work towards granting it to Georgia. In my capacity as President of the

European Parliament, I echoed this call in the European Council in June. My justification was simple: we are stronger when we are together. Today, I am proud to see Ukraine and Moldova enjoying EU candidacy status. Georgia will also be granted this status once the priorities specified in the European Commission's Opinions are adequately addressed.

Leaders of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization are also reinforcing the political and defensive structures within their alliance. And the rest of the world – democracies and autocracies, neighbouring and distant countries, lesser developed countries and advanced economies, allies and rivals – cannot be neutral between the fire and the fire brigade. Complacency is not an option. Because Putin did not stop in Crimea. And he will not stop in Kyiv. In this regard, I have to be honest, I was hoping for more support from all around the Mediterranean. Whilst I appreciate all mediation efforts, we could and should have taken an even clearer stance against Putin. We should all have rejected the aggression against Ukraine in the United Nations General Assembly. Sometimes in history, there is a clear right and a clear wrong. This was such a moment.

Moving forward, the way we will manage the immediate emergencies originating from the war – *food security, energy security and our security and defence* – will reflect the seriousness and maturity of our institutions and alliances. The Mediterranean Basin is particularly important in this respect.

Ukraine exports 95% of its grain through the Black Sea. In the last two years, more than 50% of its wheat exports went to the Middle East and North Africa.

A disruption would therefore have dire consequences for food security in many already fragile Mediterranean countries. Not to mention the potential social and political turmoil if famine were not adequately addressed. International cooperation is the only way to prevent an unprecedented food crisis in the Middle East and North Africa.

Concerning energy, the Mediterranean region's unique position gives it a great opportunity to decrease its

dependencies on Russia. We need to explore ways to step up our energy cooperation and accelerate the energy transition. What this war has shown us is that the energy transition is as much about security as it is about climate ambitions.

Investments in the Mediterranean energy sector, and notably in renewables, will also boost employment and develop economies. The southern Mediterranean region has one of the youngest populations in the world. Through its partnerships, the European Union stands ready to support the Mediterranean countries in their efforts to provide a better life for their youth through job creation, especially in strategic sectors of the economy, such as the energy sector.

There is no denying that Europe is an ageing continent with a declining working age population expected to shrink by 18 million in the next decade. In addition, changes in the skills required by the EU labour markets between 2012 and 2025 show an increasing need for highly-skilled workers (from 68 to 83 million, or +23%). We saw this during the pandemic when we were desperately looking for health-care workers. We see it now in the hospitality and aviation sectors. And when it comes to information technologies, we've long seen Europe's lack of skilled workforce. On the southern side of the Mediterranean, Africa has the same challenges. Together, we can transform this mutual challenge into a joint opportunity. Through better cooperation on targeted training, we can equip our sectors with enough skilled workers, while at the same time guaranteeing quality employment to our skilled personnel – on both sides of the Mediterranean. Migration requires a common approach from all countries. Each must play their part to address the challenges and opportunities that it brings. Cooperation based on shared responsibility – from both sides of the Mediterranean – is the only way we can achieve solid results in a sustainable way. I regret that the European Union has not yet agreed on a common response to migration. During my term as President, it remains a top priority for me to facilitate an agreement on the related legislation.

Another area where we urgently need to step up our cooperation is the protection of our environment and the fight against climate change. The Mediterranean is the second largest hotspot in the world, after the Arctic, and it is warming up 20% faster than the rest of the planet. Climate change already has a signifi-

cant impact on stability in the region: on social cohesion, on conflicts and on displacement and migration. Let me also recall that three-quarters of water resources are located in the northern Mediterranean, while three-quarters of the needs are in the South and East. Without drastic measures to meet our Paris Agreement targets, the demographic and socio-economic gap will further increase between the northern and southern Mediterranean. Such imbalances will only exacerbate tensions and conflict – be they domestic or international. With the “European Green Deal,” Europe already has an ambitious green agenda. But here, Europe acting alone is powerless. We need to concert our actions better.

Last but not least, let me address the elephant in the room. I am aware that Europe is a demanding partner. We enquire about human rights, we insist on democracy, good governance and the promotion of civil society. We are cumbersome compared to others. But give it a thought: is this such a bad thing? We are reliable partners. We put citizens at the heart of our policies. We focus on the well-being of societies. We strongly believe that striving for democratic values can benefit any agreement – whether on trade, on research or on investment. We understand that societal change cannot happen overnight, but we are ready to dialogue. The Mediterranean has a proud history of long-standing cooperation and it is my hope that we can further increase this cooperation.

In 2021, the European Union launched its new Agenda for the Mediterranean, as a gauge of its strategic interest in continuing to develop relations with its southern partners. Together we can make it a success. The recent series of visits by high-level European Union officials reflects our interest in increased cooperation. The first international forum I attended as President of the European Parliament was the European Union-Africa Summit in February 2022. My first official visit to a third country – aside from my spontaneous visit to Ukraine – was to Israel and Palestine. It was not by coincidence that I went to the Mediterranean and I am certainly planning to visit North Africa during my term. Let us jointly step up efforts to increase and nurture our partnership, in the Union for the Mediterranean, in its Parliamentary Assembly, bilaterally, with efficiency, maturity and equality. As a Mediterranean myself, let me assure you that my commitment to this important cooperation is as personal as it is institutional.