

PRESS RELEASE 6 May 2022 – for immediate release

"Europe is about the defence of multilateralism"

Day two of The State of the Union 2022

The second day of the 12th edition of [The State of the Union](#) conference gathered high-level policymakers, academics and private sector representatives at Palazzo Vecchio in Florence to discuss 'A Europe Fit for the Next Generation?'

Roberta Metsola, President of the European Parliament, opened the conference with a sharp reflection on the current multi-crisis scenario, in particular the war in Ukraine, and role that Europe must play in a new world.

"It is our whatever-it-takes moment, a moment that comes once in a generation, a moment where we must understand that Europe is also on the streets of Bucha, in the tunnels of Mariupol, in the cellars of Irpin on the shores of Snake Island. People being brutalised are looking to us for support, for hope, even for survival. They understand that there is no alternative to Europe."

She reminded the audience that the Union is much more than an economic bloc, stating that it is about a "shared dream, about shared values, about a shared future." She also pointed to the need to address polarisation and foster unity.

"We must counter the anti-EU narrative that takes hold so easily and so quickly, mis- and dis-information, enhanced by bots and fabricated in Russian troll factories. **Europe is about the defence of multilateralism.** The understanding that we can only face the future together."

Noting "a pre-Feb 24th reality and a post-Feb 24th reality", Metsola emphasised that "the weight of the global democratic order now rests more heavily than ever before on Europe's shoulders." She also directly responded to the question posed in the title of The State of the Union conference.

"Coming out of a devastating pandemic and since Russia's illegal and brutal assault on Ukraine, we are now at a historic crossroads. European leaders together must stand for the politics of hope, we must confront easy cynicism and stand firm against aggression and as long as we keep our priorities right I am convinced that we are fit for the next generation."

Josep Borrell Fontelles, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, also addressed the war in Ukraine in a session on 'Geopolitical Order and

Change of Security Architecture in Europe'. When asked if we are witnessing the start of a real geopolitical European Union, he responded, "This is the moment in which the European Union is behaving as a geopolitical actor, taking decisions also on the military side, on the energy side, using the language of power."

Borrell Fontelles also stressed that "We are not fighting against Russia, we are defending Ukraine and defending Ukraine means to defend the international order."

He also noted that there is no quest against Russia and no quest against the West, "This is about the Charter of the United Nations. It is about the sovereignty of the people, of the states, the respect for borders, not using force to override neighbours."

Defending the Russian people, he added, "It is about one regime, one political system, one person. This is a one person war. Yes, we want to weaken Putin, but we do not want to push the Russian people against the border of history. In one way or the other, they have to be part of a peaceful settlement and a peaceful security system in Europe."

Elisa Ferreira, European Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, also spoke at the conference, detailing her direct experience with the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. "Wars bring the worst of men, but the support of refugees brings out the best of humankind."

Referring to both the pandemic and the war, Ferreira said "This period will be remembered in European and world history as the reinforcement of our core values with a massive proof that we were on the right side of history."

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization, addressing the health crisis specifically, called for a "Renaissance of multilateralism."

"The pandemic has shown just how connected and interdependent we are," he said via video message. "We have no future, but a common future. In our polarised and divided world, health is one of the few areas in which nations can work together in cooperation rather than in competition."

The Prime Minister of Serbia, **Ana Brnabić**, spoke during the session 'What European perspectives for the Western Balkans?'

"We want all of the partners in the Western Balkans to become members of the European family of nations and we want to do that quickly," Brnabić said. "We view the EU as, first and foremost, the peace project - the most successful peace project of humanity – and we want to be part of that project. So many problems that we have in the Western Balkans would disappear if we were all to become part of the EU."

On day two of The State of the Union conference, approximately 400 people participated in the conference in person at Palazzo Vecchio in Florence, while around 4,000 participated online.

The State of the Union continues on Saturday, 7 May. The Historical Archives of the European Union will [open its doors and welcome the public to visit the archives and Villa Salviati](#).

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ACCESS TO PHOTOS AND FOOTAGE

[A selection of photos from day two](#)

[Rewatch the sessions from day two](#)

PROGRAMME

[The State of the Union 2022 programme](#)

ABOUT THE STATE OF THE UNION

Since 2011, [The State of the Union Conference](#) has been the annual summit for high-level reflection on the EU. With [more than 100 speakers on the programme](#), the 12th edition is the largest to date. Organised by the European University Institute in Florence each May, The State of the Union has become a key reference point for EU policymakers, civil society representatives, diplomats, business and opinion leaders, and academics. Previous speakers include presidents, prime ministers, and the heads of the European Institutions. The State of the Union is a unique forum where a diverse group of key actors gather to debate and reflect on Europe's most pressing issues. In times of crisis or instability, such a nuanced understanding of the EU's successes, failures and challenges is crucial.

The organisation of The State of the Union is made possible thanks to the support of its [partners](#).

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