

Mr Speaker,

We are living in times of discord. War is raging in the Middle East, causing enormous human suffering. The EU is united on many aspects. We condemn Hamas's heinous terrorist attacks of 7 October in which at least 1 200 people were killed and more than 220 were kidnapped. Not since the Holocaust have so many Jews been murdered on a single day.

Sweden and the EU support Israel and its clear right to defend itself in accordance with international law. At the same time, the EU emphasises that humanitarian access to Gaza – with essential supplies such as water, food and medicine – is absolutely necessary. Sweden's humanitarian assistance must be allowed to help the civilian population of Gaza. Civilian lives must be protected as far as possible.

In Sweden and in Europe, people may have differing views on the conflict in the Middle East. That is part of our democracy. But it is entirely unacceptable when actions and demonstrations against the war there develop into hate and threats against Jews here. The Swedish Government unequivocally supports our Jewish minority.

The Europe that once swore that Jews would never again need to fear for their safety is once again unsafe for Jewish families. This is a disgrace. Or to quote French President Emmanuel Macron: We must put antisemitism back where it belongs: in court and behind bars. No tolerance for the intolerable.

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Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine is the European tragedy of our time. And yet there are voices that question whether freedom is worth defending. As though appeasing dictatorship would be in the interests of democracy. If Ukraine loses, Europe loses, and then Sweden loses.

The war in Ukraine demonstrates the EU's significance to security policy. The EU Military Assistance Mission has already trained 30 000 Ukrainian soldiers. Under the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU, we agreed to provide Ukraine with one million artillery shells.

EU membership is Ukraine's goal. The Swedish Government shares that goal, and pursued the matter during the Swedish Presidency.

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Mr Speaker,

It is no longer a question of whether the EU should grow, but when and how. Spreading stability, democracy and respect for the rule of law is in our common interest.

But EU membership is not handed out willy-nilly: it is based on merit, and progress on domestic reforms. The EU has requirements and conditions that must be met. There are no shortcuts. And the rule of law must be defended and apply to new and old members alike.

At the same time, the EU must be ready to admit new members when they are ready. And the EU needs to be reformed to continue to function effectively with more Member States. This applies in particular to agricultural policy and cohesion policy. The EU's budget and decision-making procedures will also need to be reviewed.

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Seventy per cent of the criminal networks in the EU are active in at least three countries. The Government is now conducting a historic offensive against Swedish criminal gangs. We are strengthening the judicial system and giving police necessary tools and powers. We are removing secrecy restrictions so that government agencies can fight the organised economic crime that feeds gangs.

The same kind of offensive is needed in the EU. When the EU's heads of state and government decide next summer on the political priorities for the years to come, the fight against cross-border crime must be a priority issue.

The Government is working intensively on proposals to hone EU cooperation. More can be done to give the authorities better access to encrypted communications. More can also be done to cut off financial flows and to coordinate criminal investigations of cross-border offences.

Europol must be strengthened to be able to come down harder on organised crime, and more cooperation is needed to stop drugs being brought in via European ports.

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Mr Speaker,

The EU must take control of the external border. This is important for the EU, but it is also absolutely crucial for Sweden.

The Government and the Sweden Democrats are now implementing a paradigm shift in migration policy. This has already had an effect. Migration to many EU countries is increasing dramatically, but in Sweden the number of asylum seekers has decreased by 25 per cent compared with last year.

More than 200 000 migrants have crossed the Mediterranean this year alone – 52 per cent more than in the corresponding period last year. These people are grossly exploited, and this human smuggling is a significant source of income for organised crime.

Under the Swedish Presidency, the EU took a major step towards a new responsible and restrictive asylum and migration policy. This was a significant success. The aim is to reinforce the EU's external border and introduce a fast track in the reception process to differentiate between economic migrants and refugees. This will relieve pressure on the EU and Sweden.

But returns must increase. We need more cooperation and exchange of information between all relevant authorities within the EU to enforce expulsion orders. Clearer readmission agreements with countries of origin are also needed.

Cooperation with countries of origin and transit must be dramatically expanded. This is the only way to prevent the underlying causes of migration and stop large numbers of people attempting to enter Europe via lethal routes over land and sea.

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Mr Speaker,

The green transition is a core Swedish interest. Swedish businesses and industries are at the forefront of technologies that are in demand around the world – such as fossil-free steel, batteries, electric vehicles and forest-based innovations.

Sweden has already come a long way towards becoming fossil-free by phasing out oil boilers and coal power. Alongside Portugal, Sweden has the lowest per capita emissions in the entire EU. But more is needed. Climate change and environmental degradation are cross-border problems that demand cross-border solutions.

Sweden's climate policy must be built on European foundations. The EU adopted one of the world's most ambitious climate packages – Fit for 55 – under the Swedish Presidency. Now the EU has a common cause with common goals, and all of the Member States are taking their share of the responsibility. When 450 million Europeans make the transition, it will make a global difference.

Sustainable Swedish forestry is important for the transition not only in Sweden but throughout Europe. The Government is working together with Finland to create greater understanding of the importance of forests. Forests not only act as carbon sinks and are a prerequisite for biodiversity – they are also crucial in replacing fossil materials and reducing our emissions.

Nuclear energy also has a crucial role in fossil-free electricity production in the EU. The Government is working hard to ensure that both conventional nuclear energy and small modular reactors can be used as renewable energy on equal terms in the EU. We are working closely with other EU countries that are part of the 'nuclear alliance'.

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Mr Speaker,

Sweden and Europe need higher growth and the internal market is crucial to strengthening our economy. The EU is the very core of the internationalisation of Swedish industry.

But the EU's share of the global economy is shrinking and its competitiveness is waning. Increasingly, new technologies are emerging from the west coast of the United States and the east coast of China.

Europe should be a continent that is involved in developing new technologies rather than mostly importing them. This applies in equal measure to complex matters such as artificial intelligence, where the EU can take the lead in constructive regulation that promotes innovation while also tackling issues such as ethical risks.

Overall EU investment in research and development as a percentage of GDP is considerably lower than that of the United States and China, but also lower than that of Japan and South Korea. It is high time that more Member States lived up to the EU target of investing at least three per cent of GDP in research and development.

At the EU Summit in June, following considerable Swedish legwork, a new growth agenda was launched.

But growth and innovation do not spring from state-managed economies, but from knowledge-based market economies with competitive businesses. These cut red tape and pave the way for lower energy prices, quicker permit processes and better access to capital and skills.

European businesses need regulations and conditions that withstand competition. At Sweden's initiative, the decision has been made to reduce reporting requirements for businesses by 25 per cent.

Simpler and fewer rules will be a main theme for Sweden when it is time to decide on the direction for Europe's competitiveness. EU legislation must take greater account of the conditions for businesses.

Free competition in the internal market and free trade with countries outside the EU have made Europe's economy strong. But free trade agreements are also important for geopolitical reasons.

If the EU is not present in the world's growth regions, others will be. The EU's strength has long been its openness to the world. But that openness must be consistent with our interests, values and security considerations.

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Mr Speaker,

In my first Statement of Government Policy, I said that Sweden would be an active, engaged and proactive member of the EU – before, during and now after our Presidency. EU affairs are not a luxury, to be considered by the Government when time allows.

EU policy is Swedish domestic policy. Many Swedish national interests can only be safeguarded through the EU.

But Sweden is often worse than other countries at identifying and formulating its national interests. Sometimes we lack the desire to take a clear stance. Sometimes we have not sought out likeminded partners. Sometimes we have simply engaged with issues at too late a stage.

We are now changing this. The Government will institute new forms of consultation and cooperation with the business sector, the social partners and other important stakeholders who represent strategic Swedish interests. This is good for Sweden and for the EU.

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Mr Speaker,

I have outlined the Government's view of the problems and opportunities facing the EU in these turbulent times. The EU is our main forum for international cooperation, and an important platform for a small, internationally oriented country such as ours.

Let us now use that platform. To combat crime and reduce immigration by securing Europe's external borders. To succeed in the climate transition. To safeguard our Swedish export companies.

But also to protect the fundamental values of freedom, peace, democracy and the rule of law that we believe in. Sweden's history is intimately intertwined with Europe's – but so too is Sweden's future.