Mr Speaker,

We live in serious times. The war against Ukraine. Recession following high inflation. Major uncertainty in significant countries.

Against this geopolitical backdrop, many countries are turning inward. But the past 30 years have taught us that we are not as strong on our own. On the contrary, more cooperation builds a stronger and more resilient Europe.

Exactly 30 years ago today, the Swedish people voted to join the EU. They voted 'yes' to being part of Europe's community for peace, freedom and democracy. This outcome was anything but self-evident. Many felt that EU membership was irreconcilable with Sweden's policy of neutrality or even with our welfare model.

But in 1994 a majority of Swedes ultimately broke from the doctrine that had been in place since the 1960s and made the historic decision to join the EU. This has made Sweden more prosperous and freer.

Exactly thirty years after the EU referendum, Sweden also joined NATO. Another historic decision. Another decision that was considered entirely impossible, until it was considered entirely necessary. It has made Sweden more secure and NATO stronger. And with those two decisions, Sweden has come home.

Membership of the EU and NATO has never been more important. Because the world is changing rapidly – politically, economically and militarily. And more and more of the world's conflicts are reaching Europe.

We are seeing North Korean soldiers now fighting side-by-side with Russian soldiers. We are seeing Iran recruit gang members in Sweden to carry out terrorist acts on European soil. We are seeing threats of a trade war between the world's major powers.

When the major issues of our time are cross-border, we need cross-border responses. War. Crime. Climate. And competitiveness. These four words sum up why we must work together. These four words show why it would be foolish to even consider leaving the various forms of cooperation with other democracies.

Mr Speaker,

In the Statement of Government Policy, I said that there is light on the horizon in Sweden. But when we look out into the world and across Europe, times are still dark.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine will soon enter its fourth year. We see how Russia has the backing of other authoritarian states, with weapons and soldiers.

When they join forces to crush a democracy, the response from us and our friends must be crystal clear: we continue to stand with Ukraine. To help them win the war, but also peace. This is our generation's most important task.

Ultimately, this war is against the entire free world. In parallel with the war in Ukraine, Russia is doing all it can to destabilise the EU and our neighbours from within.

Now most recently we have seen this in Moldova and Georgia, where there is concrete evidence of Russian interference aimed at influencing election outcomes. In Moldova, the aim was to prevent it from forging stronger ties with the EU. But the Moldovan people resisted and voted in favour of the EU. Or as Moldovan President Maia Sandu said: "We won justly in an unjust struggle."

Mr Speaker,

In light of all this, a few things are clear: the countries of Europe need to take greater responsibility for their own security. Individually and collectively. The entire European defence industry needs to be strengthened.

In Sweden, we are doing our part by making historically large investments in both military and civil defence. At the same time, Russia's influence must be limited. We have therefore pushed for sanctions against Russia's shadow fleet and natural gas, and for revenues generated by Russian assets to be used to support Ukraine.

And the sanctions are having an effect – more than Russia will admit, although there is still more to do. Do not believe Russia's propaganda portraying its economy.

At the same time, the EU needs reforms to be able to accept new members, such as Ukraine. And the process should be based on the principle of own merits, as outlined by the EU. New members must fulfil the requirements. EU membership should be a mark of quality that shows that you stand up for democracy, human rights and the rule of law. And that you belong to the European community of values.

Mr Speaker,

Both internal and external security require that the EU has control over migration and its own external borders.

In Sweden, we have finally overhauled policy, and this year we expect have the lowest asylum immigration numbers since 1997. Previously, no one wanted to follow us. Now other countries are turning to Sweden for inspiration.

But the pressure on the rest of Europe remains high, which is why we must do more. There is now consensus in the European Council on the importance of a restrictive immigration policy. Previously, we have come nowhere close to consensus.

The Pact on Migration and Asylum is a good foundation, but it does not solve everything. The EU must use more tools to address irregular migration and increase returns among those whose applications have been rejected and who cannot stay. This is necessary to counter the 'shadow societies' and social exclusion that have been growing for far too long. There is great interest around the EU in this Government's position and solutions. Just look at the way we bundle aid policy together with migration policy. Sweden is showing the way forward in this area.

Control over migration is also fundamental to fighting organised crime. Fifty per cent of gang members are non-EU citizens. More than 70 per cent of gangs in the EU operate in at least three countries.

The criminal networks have no moral or geographical boundaries. Swedish gangsters based on Spain's Costa del Sol are defrauding Swedish pensioners out of their savings.

Killings are being ordered from Denmark and Türkiye. This cannot continue. The same offensive that the Government is waging against gangs at home is needed in the EU.

Europol must be given a stronger role in supporting the Member States in the fight against organised crime. We need more cross-border cooperation on seizing and confiscating criminal assets and status symbols. Last week, the Government enabled greater leeway to seize criminals' money and luxury items in Sweden.

Mr Speaker,

The EU has long lagged behind the United States and parts of Asia. The criminal networks have no moral or geographical boundaries.

While US dominance in advanced cutting-edge technologies has increased its productivity, EU dominance in legislation and regulation has left us falling behind. It is crystal clear that the EU has a competitiveness problem. Mario Draghi's report is a frank reminder of this, and we must take it seriously. At the same time, it is a major victory for Sweden that competitiveness has moved so high up on the EU agenda. Now we need to triumph in terms of content, too.

We need a stronger internal market with fewer barriers, particularly with respect to the services sector and the digital economy. A deeper and better capital market, preferably following the model of Sweden's reforms. More fossil-free energy. More world-leading universities and cutting-edge research. A strong free trade agenda. And less bureaucracy.

This is the only way to make the EU an agile economic superpower that develops groundbreaking innovations rather than just importing them. Where new successful companies are not only born in Europe, but also grow strong in Europe.

To achieve this, the issues of importance to the whole of Europe must also be borne up by every single Member State. The focus must be long-term national reforms, not short-term European regulations. Many countries need to learn to make difficult changes, rather than simply relying on the EU to make difficult decisions for them.

Mr Speaker,

Sweden and the EU have taken a leading role in the green transition through binding climate goals and legislation that effectively targets reduced emissions. The world's most ambitious climate package, Fit for 55, is a notable part of this. The Government is ensuring that Sweden does its part – and that this happens in a way that households can afford.

Now we must also give businesses the right tools to allow them to make the transition. Essentially, this too is about strengthening our competitiveness. Effective climate policy goes hand in hand with business.

And the same things often apply in the EU as in Sweden. Faster permit processes. More incentives for new technologies – not least for negative emissions via carbon capture and storage. And safeguarding the role of forests in the transition. Our forestry is an area that Sweden and Finland have worked hard to get Brussels to understand.

But above all, we need more fossil-free, reliable and cheap electricity. In many countries, the task is mainly one of phasing out fossil fuels. Here, it is about continuing to build on our practically fossil-free electricity system. And we welcome all forms of fossil-free energy. The Government is now taking additional concrete steps towards the next Swedish nuclear power programme.

Mr Speaker,

A small country such as Sweden, with an open and trade-dependent economy, understands the importance of the EU. Exports account for half of our overall economy. And three quarters of our overall international trade is conducted in the EU internal market. This involves a total of SEK 4 250 billion.

And almost 850 000 Swedish jobs depend on exports alone.

In spite of this, Sweden has occasionally been a somewhat reluctant EU member. But that is an approach that we cannot afford and that is not in Sweden's interests. Quite the reverse: we must be proactive and work and cooperate wholeheartedly in both the EU and NATO. We have to go all-in. Seek likeminded allies at an early stage of proceedings. And use our seat at the table to actively defend and pursue Swedish national interests.

Mr Speaker,

The task of safeguarding Sweden still rests with us. But now more than previously, we are also safeguarding our country's economy, security and global influence in close cooperation with others.