

Dear Friedrich Merz,
dear Roberta,
dear Markus Söder,
dear Manfred,
dear Carsten Linneman,
dear members of the Presidium,
of the Federal Executive Board,
dear representatives of the Women's Union
the Seniors' Union,
the Junge Union,
and the Students' Union - It's great that you are all here!

Dear delegates,
Dear representatives of associations, associations and churches,
dear friends!

On behalf of all MEPs, I warmly welcome our CDU leader in the European Parliament, Daniel Caspary!

You are a great team in Brussels and Strasbourg, a strong voice for our European Union!

Dear candidates on the national lists, I am keeping my fingers crossed for all of you for the European elections!

Dear Friedrich Merz,

With the new programme you have laid a strong and forward-looking foundation. We have experienced a firework display of debates. You have involved everyone and united our CDU. You have recharged our timeless values with new ideas.

Dear Friedrich, That is to the credit of the entire CDU, but above all it is your own personal achievement.

Dear friends, I was born in Brussels and lived there for the first 13 years of my life.

My father started his career with the young European Community. And I remember very well that my father always told us the story that probably had the strongest impact on him in his life. He was 15 years old when the Second World War ended. Europe lay in ruins. We had war and expulsion, hatred and destruction were brought to this continent. For him, all perspective and certainty had been destroyed. It was just sheer horror.

And then the European idea germinated. Europe was not divided into victors and vanquished, we were not exiled from the European community. Instead, clever men and women reached out their hands to us and welcomed Germany back into the circle of free democratic nations.

Of course, I didn't understand that as a child. But in the playground and at school I learned French, Dutch, Italian and Flemish. And I sensed that this is something special. And today I know that peace in Europe is something special. Today I know that democracy in Europe cannot be taken for granted. Today I know that diversity in Europe is something unique in the world.

And this Europe in its uniqueness, dear friends, this Europe must be preserved and protected.

My father died in 2014. Many in this room know that the farewell had begun years earlier. Alzheimer's is a slow disease. It was a sad time for me but also an important time. He spoke about Europe at the end, as if it was part of our family. And that we have to take good care of it. And I didn't really understand that at the time either.

But today I know why! And about this "why" I would like to talk about here today.

Dear friends, today, Germany is firmly anchored in Europe, and the fact that this is the case has a lot to do with France and Poland. It all started with

reconciliation with France. And the coming together of a divided Europe would not have been possible without a clear commitment to our historical responsibility towards Poland. The beginning of the Weimar Triangle. And this foundation of the Weimar Triangle must be renewed again and again. And that is also an obligation for me. Because I know that this is the cement, that we in Europe have to keep strengthening.

On Monday, I was in Paris with President Macron for an exchange with Chinese President Xi. It was about our common interest as Europeans towards China. Yesterday I was in Poland with Donald Tusk about Russia's brutal war of aggression in Ukraine. It was about Europe's security and ability to defend itself. And these talks are based on the self-evident the interests of our friends and neighbours. A great deal of trust has grown in Europe. Also and especially us in Germany.

This would never have been possible without clear words about the crimes that Nazi Germany committed. Now the honorary chairman of the AfD is talking about this period of the "bird's-eye view of German history".

Dear friends, anyone who talks like this about our responsibility is not only oblivious to history and cynical! Anyone who talks like this, is an arsonist in our European house.

Dear friends, when we talk about threats to our democracy then it's not just about positions and content. It's also about people. No matter whether local council, state parliament or European Parliament.

We must protect all those from attacks who are committed to our democratic society and our country. No matter what party they belong to. No matter whether in the election campaign or in the exercise of their offices. No matter whether during the day or at night.

Because when these people are no longer safe, then our democracy will no longer be safe. Perpetrators must feel the full force of the law.

And anyone who plays with fire in our European house also takes an axe to the single market which is the foundation of our prosperity.

No member state benefits more from the European single market than Germany.

The European single market makes Germany 132 billion euros richer - every year! 55% of the exports of German SMEs go to Europe.

And then the AfD brings up the idea of Germany leaving Europe - a DEXIT. Let's take a look then, what that would mean. A DEXIT - according to IW Cologne – could cost Germany around 10% of its economic output.

A DEXIT, as the AfD wants, would mean a loss of prosperity of 400 to 500 billion euros a year for Germany. In Germany as an exporting country, an AfD DEXIT would mean around 2.2 million jobs would be lost.

This AfD has understood nothing.

The AfD European election programme is nothing less than a programme to destroy jobs.

Dear friends, instead of waffling on about DEXIT like the AfD, we should talk more about how we can make our European economy stronger and there is a lot to do. I would like to briefly outline three areas.

First of all, there is the competitiveness of our economy. We need to make it easier for our companies. More skilled workers. Lower energy costs. More digitalization. And easier access to capital. A better integrated Capital Markets Union could generate up to 470 billion euros more investment - per year.

The Commission's proposals have been on the table for a long time. What matters now is that the European finance ministers pull together and deliver results.

We also need to dictate less to our companies and trust them more. So that they can concentrate on what they are good at - be innovative, competitive products and create good jobs. This also means less bureaucracy, simpler procedures and faster decisions.

Friedrich, as you said again on Monday, we need less Europe on the small matters and more Europe on the big matters. That's why I want to remove 25% of the reporting obligations for companies - because it is the big issues that matter.

Dear friends, we all know that the wind is blowing rougher on the world markets. Climate change is real. We must do more. And we have every opportunity!

We can see that in Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt. Every third chip in Europe is "made in Saxony". And in future, Saxony-Anhalt, along with Magdeburg, will also be at the starting line. With strong support from Europe.

Dear Michael Kretschmer,
dear Rainer Haseloff,

You are at the forefront of semiconductor production in Dresden and Magdeburg, the hub of digital Europe! Chapeau!

Or another example, the whole world is betting on clean hydrogen. Dear Hendrik Wüst, you recognised the potential of clean hydrogen earlier than others.

From the Marl Chemical Park to Leverkusen the longest hydrogen pipeline in Germany winds its way. Thank you for the close cooperation between NRW and Europe on this issue!

And in the north you show, Daniel Günther, how wind power works!

And I was recently in Garching and was able to see it there, dear Markus Söder, how Bavaria is cleverly a world leader in nuclear fusion. Nuclear fusion would be ideal to complement renewable energies in the energy mix of the future.

Europe is a global leader in nuclear fusion research and Bavaria is the clear leader in Europe.

And what do these examples all have in common? These innovative and clean energies are not only good for the climate, they are not only good for our economy, our prosperity and our competitiveness, they are also good for our energy independence.

I have not forgotten how Putin has blackmailed us with our dependence on Russian gas. But we have freed ourselves from it. We didn't let ourselves be beaten down. We stuck together.

Our friends, like the Norwegians and the Americans, helped us and we have also invested massively in renewable, clean energy. With success! Last year, for the first time, we generated more electricity in Europe from wind than from gas. We are now independent of Russia's dirty energy.

And that, dear friends, also and above all, we did with European solidarity.

And looking ahead, two things are important.

The first is that we do not fall from one dependency to another. Take electromobility, for example. We like fair competition. What we don't like is when China floods the market with massively subsidized e-cars.

We are taking action against this and protecting our industry. Competition yes, dumping no.

And the second, is that we bring competitiveness and climate protection together. We know that there is no competitive economy without climate

protection. But there is also no climate protection without competitive companies. We want them to continue to lead the world markets in the future. Whether microchips or clean steel. Whether hydrogen, wind power or electric mobility. These are the growth drivers of tomorrow's economy. They should provide good jobs and prosperity here, and not at the other end of the Silk Road!

But Europe is so much more than the economy and the single market. It is breathtaking landscapes and natural monuments. Here in Germany alone. From the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site to the Black Forest National Park, from the sandstone cliffs of Saxon Switzerland to the moors of the High Fens. We want to protect and preserve nature.

Our children and grandchildren would rightly never forgive us if we shirked this task. We must preserve this homeland for them! For me, this is not just responsibility; for me, good nature conservation is intergenerational justice. Let's discuss how we get there, but there's no question in my mind that we have to protect nature.

Dear friends,

Competition and the preservation of nature are also important to our farmers.

They get up at the first crow of the rooster. They work hard for the high-quality food that ends up on our tables. Their costs for seed, fertilizer and energy increase from year to year. But the prices they receive for milk, meat and grain fluctuate. The big players in the food chain are putting pressure on them. Markets are a good thing.

But we cannot expect farmers to sell their food below the cost of production. That is neither acceptable nor is it sustainable. We need to put the system back on a solid footing. The hard work in agriculture must pay off! And if they are adequately remunerated, then our farmers themselves are the best stewards of our natural environment. We have to get there!

Dear friends, my third point is about security and defence. We all sense that our geopolitical environment is changing rapidly and radically. As a result, the risks for Europe are also increasing considerably. Russia's brutal war of aggression is not only an attack on Ukraine, but also an attack on the rules to which we have owed peaceful coexistence in Europe for 70 years.

International law must apply. Just like the borders of sovereign states. This is our peace order. If Putin's cold calculation in Ukraine works out, we will no longer be safe here in Europe.

Anyone who talks and acts like Putin does not want peace. And this threat remains. Yesterday we saw the self-enthronement of Putin for the next 6 years.

No one wants lasting peace in their own country more than the people of Ukraine. Therefore, dear friends, We can never match the courage and determination of the Ukrainians. But what we can and must do today and in the future is stand firmly by their side.

Even if it requires effort, even if it costs, we must reinvest in freedom and peace. Because the price we would have to pay if Russia were to annex Ukraine would be many times higher.

Europe must invest more money in defence. We need to invest more wisely together. And above all, we need to invest in the defence industry in Europe.

We want a Europe that can defend itself. We know how important NATO is. That is why we are in favour of a European defence union. And that is why I will appoint a Commissioner for Defence in the next mandate who will focus on the defence industry in the internal market.

We want to make Europe strong in order to preserve peace on our continent.

Dear friends,

When we talk about security, we must also talk about illegal migration. Hardly any other topic triggers such emotions. Hardly any other topic is more important.

Dear Boris Rhein, dear Kai Wegner,

You have clearly addressed the problems and convinced people. That is the right way to go.

Last month, we adopted the Pact on Migration and Asylum in the European Parliament. With this pact, we are further strengthening Europe's external borders. We are ensuring faster and simpler procedures. But that alone is not enough. Illegal migration is mainly caused by smugglers and traffickers. Smugglers and traffickers make billions in business. They lie to people, rob them and put them on unseaworthy rubber dinghies.

I was in Lampedusa and saw the misery with my own eyes. It is high time we took tougher action against this organized crime. To put it bluntly: we have fulfilled our international obligations in the past, we are doing so today and we will continue to do so in the future.

But it is we, the Europeans, who decide who comes to Europe and under what circumstances. And not the organized crime of smugglers and human traffickers.

That's why I traveled to Tunisia, to Mauritania, to Egypt. Last week I was in Lebanon. I am interested in pragmatic agreements and concrete steps. With the countries of transit and origin we can develop common perspectives and interests.

For example, on the issue of clean energy. On the topic of education. But of course also on the issue of security and migration.

On the one hand, this is about legal and safe routes for those who want to work here, who want to work for our companies and who have prospects of staying.

But on the other hand, it's also about that people return, those who are not entitled to asylum. There is a huge problem here. That has to change.

Not only because our local authorities are on the verge of being overwhelmed. But also because democracy is only strong when it delivers solutions. And that is what we, the Christian Democrats, stand for in this election.

Dear friends, if we tackle the challenges then people will not fall prey to those who rely on anger and hatred and carry the poison of division into society. Those who do everything to stir up fear. Our task is to counter the agents of fear with arguments.

And on the other hand, we would do well to gage the moods. The pace of digitalization, global warming and the increasing number of wars and crises are challenging people. That's why we have to show every day that democracy provides the better answers.

We can do that too. Just think of the pandemic. It certainly wasn't the torchlight processions, barriers and tinfoil hats, that defeated the virus.

With solidarity and great medical achievements, we have successfully led a continent of 450 million people through this difficult time. We have overcome the energy crisis together. And together, we are standing up to Russian aggression and Putin's contempt for all democratic values. Putin and the dividers in our societies have one thing in common: Democracy is in their way.

They contribute nothing and have no interest in solving the real challenges of our time.

No answer to digitalization,
No answer to climate change,
No answer to competitiveness.

I am not surprised that the Czech secret service is investigating two candidates who are at the top of the AfD list for the European elections. They have been agitating against the European Union for a long time. And they have never made a secret of their admiration for the democracy despiser in the Kremlin. They have carried his propaganda into our societies. Whether they have taken bribes from Russia or not ... Their behaviour is destructive, dishonest and oblivious to history.

Some time ago, the handcuffs clicked on a close associate of the AfD lead candidate for the European elections.

The investigating judge at the Federal Court of Justice is convinced that the man is spying for China from within the European Parliament.

Let me summarize once again: The AfD is making propaganda for Putin and spying for China.

First the AfD rants about the people and the fatherland and then the AfD betrays it to autocrats. They should be ashamed of themselves! We have nothing in common with such unreliable people.

Anyone who wants to work with us Christian Democrats after the European elections, must fulfill 3 criteria.

1. a clear commitment to the rule of law.
2. a clear commitment to Ukraine and against the crimes of the Kremlin.
3. and a clear commitment to our Europe.

With the servants of the Kremlin, despisers of democracy and extremists, there is no state and no European Union either.

Dear friends, our Europe was created to serve the people. That is our mission and we are committed to it. Of course, our European Union is not perfect. When 27 states and 450 million people work together, there are always things that don't work the same.

We have to work on them. But that should never obscure our view of what our Europe achieves. Our EU is one of the most prosperous and socially progressive regions in the world. Whether peace, freedom and democracy, climate change or digitalization, no matter how big the challenges are...!

As a community, we have the better answers to offer.

Dear friends,

I am more convinced than ever, that democracy itself is our greatest locational advantage. When people in 27 member states go to the ballot box in June, this is a moment in which we renew the democratic foundations of our Union. A moment, in which we reflect again on what is really important to us.

You can do business and have a career anywhere in the world.

But where do people want to settle down and raise their children?

Where the streets are safe. Where they have prospects. Where everyone has access to good education and culture - regardless of how much money they have.

Where everyone has access to healthcare - regardless of how much money they have.

Where there is lasting peace.

Where they can move freely, study, work, across borders that no longer exist.

Where they can build something for themselves, that remains theirs.

Where the rule of law wins and not arbitrariness.

That is what our European Union stands for.

That is what our European People's Party stands for.

That is what our CDU stands for.

And that is what I stand for.

For me, one thing is clear,
the question of why

has long been answered by Europe.

Europe is our future today.

And our home.

So let's work together for a strong Europe,

And let's fight for our homeland!

Long live Europe!