



Speech by the Elected President

General Assembly, Strasbourg, 14 February 2025

Dear Pan-European friends,

The trust you have bestowed on me by electing me President of the oldest movement for European unification is a great honour. The legacy of Pan-European ideas and your trust compel me to work with all of you to serve our noble ideals. I look forward to contributing to the realisation of the vision of a united Europe and a peaceful global order. In cooperation with all of you, I will strive to meet the expectations of our worthy Pan-European family, which extends across Europe, with forty member organisations in 30 countries.

I am committed to strengthening existing Pan-European organisations. We will expand Paneurope in regions where there is a need and a will to act. Similarly, my goal is to revive the Pan-European spirit where it has weakened or faded. Together, we will plant the Pan-European seed where it has not yet germinated. We will particularly strive to rejuvenate the movement in line with the founder's vision, who addressed the youth of Europe. Every generation must strengthen and revive the Pan-European vision. It is a precious guide towards a better future for Europe and the world.

First, I would like to express my deep gratitude to President Alain Terrenoire. I still remember his inaugural speech. In this room, he paid tribute to his predecessor, Otto von Habsburg, with dignity and inspiration. Thus, I wish to thank him for his magnificent cooperation and the trust he showed me by proposing me as his successor at the head of the Pan-European Union. On behalf of all of us, I also wish to honour him and express my gratitude for everything he has accomplished for the Pan-European movement.

President Terrenoire comes from the Pan-European family. His father, Louis Terrenoire, restored the Pan-European Union in France in 1960. At that time, Alain was just a teenager. He thus adopted the Pan-European vision from a very young age. In 1961, he founded the Union of European Democratic Youth (UJDE), the youth movement of the French Committee of the Pan-European Union. At the head of Paneurope France, he continued his noble leadership mission from 2003 to 2013, a mission that dates back to great Pan-European French personalities such as Aristide Briand. Through his work as International President, he instilled a dynamic spirit and encouraged the vision.

He represented Pan-European values from the age of 25 as the youngest member of the French National Assembly in 1967, and as a Member of the European Parliament since 1974. His whole family is Pan-European, from ancestors to grandchildren. His family extended its branches from

the West to Eastern Europe, from France and Germany to Hungary and Bulgaria. I am pleased that his wife Edith, who also greatly contributed to the Pan-European work of this esteemed family, is with us today.

I would like to pay special tribute to the devoted work with which President Terrenoire has led the Pan-European Union. As he announced in his inaugural speech, his actions were dedicated to the collective. He discreetly endeavoured to instil a spirit of solidarity in our movement at all times. He was a president who took part in events all over Europe, from the Atlantic coast and the Mediterranean to the Baltic and the Black Sea. He accepted invitations to meetings whenever he could. He worked in harmony with the members and showed what exemplary pan-European co-operation should look like..

This is also an opportunity to honour Otto von Habsburg, who left an indelible mark during his 31 years at the head of the Pan-European Union. We had the privilege of working with and learning from this honourable man. I described his life's journey in the epilogue of his *Biography* as “a majestic and dignified walk of noble birth, who traversed a Europe shaken by two global catastrophes, as a true Pan-European democrat by conviction and who contributed significantly to the reconciliation and unification of Europe”.

When he took over the leadership of the Pan-European Union, Europe was still divided by the Iron Curtain. However, he not only spoke, but also acted politically to break down the barriers and walls that divided the continent. In this legislative chamber, he left an empty seat for the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe beyond the Iron Curtain. He crowned his leadership as President of the Pan-European Union by welcoming the largest enlargement of the European Union in 2004.

I am also delighted to honour his daughter and close collaborator, Walburga Habsburg Douglas. As Secretary General and Acting Vice-President of the International Pan-European Union, she was the president's right hand. She led the historic mission to dismantle the Iron Curtain of Europe at the Pan-European picnic in Sopron.

I would also like to thank the President of the Pan-European Union Germany, Bernd Posselt. As an assistant of Otto von Habsburg, he was steeped in Pan-European visions from an early age. Fifty years ago, he founded the Pan-European Youth in Germany. For decades, he has headed the largest Pan-European organisation. For twenty years, he served in these parliamentary seats as a deputy. He distinguished himself in the European Union's negotiation and enlargement committees. He continues to tirelessly attend plenary sessions of the European Parliament, making a significant contribution to legislative activity and European politics.

Finally, let me express my gratitude to the person who breathed life into the Pan-European Union in Croatia and introduced me to the Pan-European family. Mislav Ježić, the first President of the Croatian Pan-European Union, member of the Presidency Council, and Vice-President of the International Pan-European Union since 1994, has made a significant contribution to the enlargement and strengthening of the Pan-European mission in Croatia and across Europe.

Many others also deserve mention, but I will stop here to express our collective gratitude. The Pan-European idea unites us, elevates us, and transcends us all.

When Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi launched the Pan-European Union, the vision of a united Europe was considered a utopia. He faced many challenges, persecutions, and seizures; the founding Pan-European archives are still in Moscow. However, he lived to see the creation of free European communities that led to the realisation of the Pan-European vision. His motto was a united, free, democratic, and peaceful Europe. In the eulogy, Otto von Habsburg described how Coudenhove opened new paths. His goal was to see, from afar – like Moses the Promised Land – the realisation of the Pan-European objective, which divine providence granted him after half a century of hard work.

The “successor of Coudenhove” continues the original vision of European unification. Convicted that freedom and diversity are decisive characteristics of European culture, Otto von Habsburg shifted the emphasis on their defence as a duty to humanity. He particularly committed to freeing the oppressed part of Europe in the Centre and East. The Pan-European mission has been imbued with Christian roots and spirit. He gave greater prominence to the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity.

When Alain Terrenoire took the helm of Paneurope, the largest wave of European Union enlargement was over. But huge challenges followed: economic and monetary crisis, migration, wars, and new imperialist pretensions toward Europe. His motto was that of a sovereign, strong, independent, and united Europe. He visited all Pan-European organisations. He encouraged new progress and visions. He strengthened Pan-European solidarity. Under his presidency, the European Union enlarged to three countries: Bulgaria, Romania, and Croatia. The Great Britain left the Union.

I would like to continue with you this magnificent mission of supporting European unification. The times ahead will certainly bring challenges. War conflicts, invasions of European countries, customs closures of markets, unilateral policies, and the collapse of the global liberal order loom before us. For the coming period, I highlight the following priorities to address these challenges: freedom, peace, solidarity, and democracy.

The main focus remains the same: freedom and peace. Our Pan-European motto reminds us that solidarity must be strengthened in essential areas. Solidarity and human fraternity are crucial to defending and preserving the cohesion of society. Concerning controversial issues, we must preserve freedom of thought in diversity. Tolerance is the formula by which European societies have developed the greatest degree of freedom of expression in diversity compared to other parts of the world. In this regard, democracy is the appropriate political framework for governance based on human dignity.

The European Union is now one of the five great global powers. It is necessary to strengthen its common foreign policy and defence capability so that it can protect the life, liberty, and well-being of its citizens. Seventy-five years ago, six countries launched the economic and political integration of Europe. Today, the Union comprises 27 countries, from the Atlantic to the Black Sea.

President Terrenoire highlighted that three Pan-European presidents came from the founding countries. The symbolic message lies in the proposal to elect a president from the country that last joined the European Union. He gave an indication of the direction Pan-European activity should take. In the coming period, we must open up more towards Southeast Europe, which is

eagerly awaiting enlargement. With this region, we must support the defence and membership of Ukraine, Moldova, and the countries that wish to join and deserve to become members of the European Union.

Therefore, I invite you all to work with me to realise the noble Pan-European ideals. May Pan-Europe continue to act as a vanguard and visionary driving force for a free, peaceful, united and democratic Europe. May a united Europe based on Pan-European principles become a model for a just world.

Pavo Barišić