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**“The chance to give European Integration a new meaning”**

**Meeting of the European Parliament Delegation to the Conference on the  
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Colleagues, we probably all agree that with Russian invasion nothing is as it used to be. If we want to live in peace and benefit from it, we must defend peace and democracy. There is an abundant evidence that democracy, built upon values of freedom, human dignity, equality, and the rule of law provides solid foundation for long-term competitiveness of our economy that goes beyond growth and productivity. We know authoritarian regimes that can be highly competitive, but competitiveness, which is not rooted in values we cherish but in coercion and power-based industrial relations, has short legs.

To strengthen our security, as rightly pointed out by citizens in their recommendation 2, the Union must reduce dependencies from oil and gas imports, particularly from Russia. President von der Leyen reiterated yesterday during our extraordinary plenary on Ukraine Europe’s staunch commitment to energy security. And on a trade-related level, abiding by rule of law, functioning within an open, inclusive, rules based and non-discriminatory multilateral trading system, ensures level playing field and stable procedures in which European businesses can thrive.

If trading rules are applied through a power-based prism, we risk creating zero-sum games, which would especially hurt weaker economies. In the absence of level playing field, our companies compete against economic actors that do not respect basic market principles and benefit from unregulated market-distortive measures imposed by authoritarian regimes. In the ongoing international technological race, it is the European duty in alliance with like-minded partners to fly the flag of

democratic values and ethics while shaping common regulatory spaces to promote healthy economic competition.

At the same time, as pointed out by citizens in recommendation 24, the EU must stand ready to act assertively in defending its interests and enforcing its rights. Our recently concluded trade agreements, not yet ratified by member states, include robust social, environmental, labour and human rights protection clauses that must be enforced. Sitting on non-ratified agreements greatly risks undermining our credibility and has the potential to hinder the so-called “Brussels effect”. This needs to change. The Union cannot, through its trade and investment agreements, defend European values and rules that are not in force at home.

Citizens’ panels’ debates show that citizens see that trade lies at the intersection of many pressing and urgent challenges affecting their everyday life. Trade policy can be an accelerator for positive change in our response to climate change, in promoting labour and human rights, ensuring the security and resilience of supply chains, or banning child labour. It is true that globalization has lifted millions of people from poverty, but it also strengthened inequalities. Our responsibility is to make globalization sustainable and socially fair able to deliver on the expectations of people.

To that end, the European Union has a role to play when it comes to collaborating with developing countries, as pointed out in Citizens’ recommendation 12. The EU is already very active on that topic. Let me just point out to one example: the EU is currently negotiating with Angola its first standalone investment facilitation agreement.

This novel type of trade agreement would help Angola create a transparent, predictable and attractive climate for domestic and foreign investors.

We must also continue to be a staunch defender of an effective multilateral trading system, with the World Trade Organization at its core. Only trade that functions in a rules-based environment, founded on predictable norms and stable procedures can create a win- win situation across the world. I trust we all agree that European and national institutions must better communicate about trade policy to our citizens. The

experience tells us that citizens do not feel informed about how we negotiate our trade agreements, which can create resentment at national level. We must improve our internal communication habits to ensure that all those potentially affected feel informed and prepared.

To conclude let me say that when we see Ukrainians so ardently fighting for our common European values, we must support them to the fullest possible extent and welcome them in the Union. The tragic situation created by the Russian leader means for us a chance to give a new meaning to what European integration is. The Conference is our momentum to use this chance.