



## European Commission - Speech [Check Against Delivery]



### **Speech by President von der Leyen at the Atlantic Council's Distinguished Leadership Awards**

Washington, DC, , 11 November 2021

Thank you Fred Kempe,

Thank you Phil for your kind words.

I feel incredibly honoured by this award.

The fact that the Atlantic Council is awarding me as a "*European and transatlantic citizen*", means so much to me.

That is exactly how I feel: a European and a transatlantic citizen.

My great-grandmother was born here in the United States in 1883.

When she was 19 years old, she married a German merchant, my great-grandfather, and she moved to Bremen, a city in Northern Germany and spend there the rest of her life.

My father was 15 years old, when WWII ended.

He saw all the atrocities and horrors of war as a boy, but he also made the overwhelming experience of liberation thanks to the United States and its allies.

After the war, he was one of the first German students awarded a Fulbright US-scholarship.

He studied at Cornell University.

For him, a completely new world opened up through the generosity and foresight of a US politician.

He never forgot this great experience throughout his life.

He passed on the typical American "*Why-Not-*" and "*Can-Do-spirit*" to his children.

Round about 45 years later I fell in love with the US, during the years I spent as a trailing spouse in Stanford.

My husband was a postdoc and later faculty member at the division of cardiovascular medicine in Stanford headed at that time by Dr Victor Dzau.

So we moved to California, with our – at that time - three children.

In Germany, in the early Nineties, it wasn't that common to be a mother while having a professional life, too.

Coming to the US felt like a breath of fresh air.

No one questioned my choice of being a working mom.

Everyone expected both me and my husband to work and take care of the kids.

I felt supported and empowered like never before.

Two more children were born,

Thus, since then my husband and I are proud parents of two American citizens.

The story of the transatlantic ties is made of millions of stories like mine.

But most importantly, it's made of shared values and interests between the two shores of the Ocean.

This was true when the Atlantic Council was created, exactly sixty years ago.

And it is still true today, in an entirely different world

Compared to the era of the Cold War.

Yes, the EU and America are still natural partners.

Even if recently we may have disagreed on some difficult choices, our interests and values converge on all of the most crucial issues of our times.

For example:

Shaping the economic recovery while fighting climate change.

Rewriting modern rules for the global economy.

And protecting our democracies.

I would like to briefly address these three issues tonight.

Because on all of them, the EU and the United States are on the same side of the table.

And surely on the same side of history.

First, on a green recovery.

What are the EU's and America's interests?

We both want to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees, while at the same time, relaunching the economy both domestically and around the world.

This means, on the one hand, decarbonising our economies investing in green innovation and clean technologies and high quality infrastructure at home.

And on the other hand, supporting developing countries to leapfrog to a carbon-neutral future.

As President Biden and I demonstrated at the COP in Glasgow last week, the EU and the United States are fully aligned on this.

We initiated together a Global Methane Pledge and got more than 100 countries to join.

We are working on a circular economy, that gives back more to nature than it takes.

We are both working on a pilot with South Africa to help them close their coal plants and create green jobs instead.

And at the G20 in Rome, we agreed not only to pause our disputes on steel and aluminium, but to join our efforts to decarbonise these two crucial industries.

The EU and the United States are exactly where they should be:

Showing global leadership to ensure nothing less than the survival of our planet at stake.

Second, on rewriting modern rules for the global economy.

The challenge we face here is clear.

Fast technological change and shifting economic forces need a modern rulebook and effective international action.

Take tech-policy.

Both the EU and America want to become less dependent on international supply chains for critical technologies.

We can help each other to diversify and improve resilience.

For example on the critical issues on semi-conductors.

Here at the Atlantic Council, you have recently argued that it is time for a transatlantic digital policy.

Well, with the EU-US Trade and Technology Council we are taking steps in the right direction.

And I imagine us cooperating also on the rules for digital platforms.

We have a convergent vision on how digital platforms should work in open societies and open economies.

Then let me touch on building the networks we need for the global economy.

We in the EU are about to present a new strategy to connect the world, called Global Gateway.

Like President Biden's Build Back Better for the world, Global Gateway will seek to be a multiplier for high standard investment in infrastructure, around the world.

Our initiatives will help build much-needed networks for transport, energy, trade, data and people, while insisting on the highest environmental and labour standards, and on financial transparency.

It will forge links, not create dependencies.

When the EU and the US come together, we have the power to shape the world of tomorrow, from 6G to green finance.

Finally, this year has reminded us that we must stand up for democracy every day.

Democracy is being challenged from both inside and outside.

Authoritarian regimes tried to influence the outcome of our democratic elections.

In the US, hundreds of people attacked the Capitol, the heart of your democracy.

In the EU, some Member States are questioning basic democratic principles upon which our Union is built.

It is again time to stand up for the values that define our democracies.

We believe in the freedom of citizens with both rights and responsibilities.

We believe in the rule of law, every human being is equal before the law.

We believe in the dignity of every person and thus the fundamental rights.

It is again time to speak up for our democracies.

I know we can count on the Atlantic Council for this.

And I want to thank you, not just for this award, but for keeping alive the flame of transatlantic cooperation towards a new day in our deep friendship.

Thank you.

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