

**Sperrfrist Redebeginn
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort**



**Verleihung des
Internationalen Karlspreises zu Aachen 2025**

an

**Dr. Ursula von der Leyen,
Präsidentin der Europäischen Kommission**

**Rede
König Felipe VI. von Spanien**

englisch



CASA DE S.M. EL REY
COMUNICACIÓN

**EMBARGO: HASTA EL FINAL DEL DISCURSO
— SÓLO ES VÁLIDO EL DISCURSO PRONUNCIADO —**

**— Remarks by His Majesty the King —
at the Charlemagne Prize Ceremony honoring Ursula Von Der Leyen,
President of the European Comission
Aachen. May 29th, 2025**

Six years ago, when I last spoke here, I said that by then some had renounced the supranational European dream, not to embrace the wider world, but to turn their backs on it. I also argued that this rejection did not stem from nostalgia for idealized past glories, but from fear of an uncertain present and future.

With these reflections in mind, I now would like to turn to the voices that seek to exploit this uncertainty, to further question integration of the EU. Voices echoing across Europe that we should all challenge... We need to confront them! Dangerous and misguided voices that argue that Europeans will be freer, more independent and sovereign if they inhabit separate national political communities and work alone to address global challenges.

Nothing could be further from the truth. This belief would reduce European citizens to residents of much-diminished and powerless states, exposed and vulnerable to the whims of others. Should this narrow vision prevail across Europe, we would witness the weakening of the EU, the undoing of some of its most important tools —those that were built to procure prosperity for Europe's citizens—, and a drastic reduction of its capacity to act on the global stage.

No single European state could assume this mantle alone. It would simply be lost and gifted to other actors in the international system, most likely others with different values and interests.

Therefore, when one looks at the great challenges we face, it should be clear to all that the only way to address them is by working together, as President Von der Leyen —in whose honour we gather today— has repeatedly stressed. This is true in the security, economic and diplomatic fronts.

On security, a clear message is coming out of Washington: Europeans ought to do more to provide for the defence of their own continent. We should not underestimate how consequential this message is. There are few alive today that have lived in a Europe where the US was not the predominant security provider. This call for European autonomy should be answered in unison, because it is impossible to respond otherwise; it is not possible to respond effectively with 27 disconnected security and defence policies, nor with 27 different procurement processes resulting in fragmented force structures.

Let me tell you without a sliver of a doubt: Europe will only be mighty if it stands together. Drawing again on the words of President Von Der Leyen, we will only be able to deter aggression and defend ourselves if we work together.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine also requires a concerted effort by all of us, not just to support Ukraine, or to defend a rules-based international order. Above all, to ensure the building of a lasting European security architecture, that may prevent similar lawless actions in the future. Europe needs to develop its hard power, and we need to do it together. There can be no security without an overall vision, without a shared strategy, without a common determination.

We are also facing important challenges on the economic front. As we speak, we are—in fact—witnessing the fracture of the international economic and trading order. This is a consequence of the ongoing tariff war, the erosion of the World Trade Organization's role, and the weakening of very important public goods like the safety of sea-lanes. The consequence is a far riskier environment for international business accompanied by a reorganization—and even an outright reduction—of global trade flows.

How should Europeans adjust to this? In a context where access to international markets is increasingly difficult, the answer cannot come from further self-limitation, from erecting barriers across our 27 jurisdictions. Our producers, exporters, or entrepreneurs will not benefit from a more fragmented European economic space. Therefore, it is obvious that we should further strengthen our single market, a vast market of hundreds of millions of consumers. And as Enrico Letta and Mario Draghi have clearly indicated, there are numerous ways to deepen and enhance our economic union.

Finally, on diplomacy, let me just share a very brief reflection. The international political order is changing. It is also fragmenting. We can see the beginnings of a weakened multilateral system, and the emergence of a global arena shaped more by power politics than by rules. One in which commitment to collective efforts and the pursuit of the common good is diminished.

Once again, the question facing Europeans is crystal-clear: How can we navigate this new environment? How can we up-hold and forward our values, deploy our resources most effectively, and ensure that our treasured European way of life (including equality, the rule of law and human rights), is best protected? In a world of giants, having 'one voice'—or a clearly and powerfully concerted one—in global affairs has to be the answer.

The European project, in its full dimension—that of an integrated economic and political community—enhances the sovereignty of European citizens. Spaniards are freer because we are part of Europe. We are wealthier because we belong to the EU and its Single Market. Our culture and language are better shared and protected in a community of nearly 500 million people. Our values are better defended at home and abroad..., and our interests are further advanced when we work together.

I say this precisely because next month marks the 40th anniversary of the signing of Spain's accession to what was then the EEC (European Economic Community), which came into effect on 1 January 1986. It is important to remember where we come from. We are more Spanish because we belong to Europe. Not the other way around.

The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, whom we honour today with this prestigious and historic Charlemagne Prize, has always understood the importance of European unity, as I have already mentioned. In this regard, I would like to recall her words from the European Parliament Plenary on the new College of Commissioners: "It is time to come together".

She is the embodiment of the European spirit and hence, a more than worthy recipient of this award. She has now managed very significant crises for Europe with great success and by fostering unity. This is true of the Brexit negotiations, where keeping European unity and coherence was central, the response to the Covid19 pandemic, where speed and scale were central to the effectiveness of our actions, or the launch of the Next Generation funds that have been so vital for many EU economies.

She is now facing new and important challenges. Arriving to a fair peace in Ukraine, upholding international law in the war in Gaza, navigating a fracturing international trade system, steering Europe into an era of true strategic autonomy or defending multilateralism. At the core of these efforts lies a firm commitment to a rules-based international order, grounded in universal values: freedom, human rights, cooperation and justice.

The way we address these issues now (today), will determine the future for generations of Europeans. Because what is at stake is not what we have, but who we are. My hope is that when we look back decades from today, we may conclude that we were indeed successful in building a stronger Europe. That it all allowed for us Europeans to live in peace, within and with our neighbours. That we made ourselves more influential, more prosperous, and more innovative. These lofty goals call for greater European unity. Moreover, the international environment —I strongly believe— calls for more Europe. It is now, truly, the time for Europe. Not for a more ‘euro-centric’ vision of the world; but yes for a greater, honest and more respectful contribution of our actions and values to a better world.

We honour the President of the European Commission today despite the fact that her work is still very much ongoing. Hence, I hope this award serves as further impetus to the European spirit that has fuelled her actions in the past; may she, at every turn, find ways to strengthen our shared project.... May it be so, that as before, from crises emerges a more united and stronger Europe.

“Europe must choose its best option: Union”. These words are not my own. They are hers, and we share them —fully, faithfully—. Because in unity, we see strength. In solidarity, a future.... In this, her voice becomes ours.

Congratulations and god-speed, dear Ursula.