

«Prime Ministers, Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am sorry I cannot be with you on this occasion - I am currently in China for the EU-China summit, but I am grateful for the opportunity to pass a message to this inaugural meeting of the European Nuclear Energy Forum.

Let me first briefly set out the European policy context and then give you my views on the role of nuclear within this new context and the Forum's mandate.

This Forum is being set up at a crucial stage, where the interlinked challenges of energy and climate change are at the very top of the European Union's agenda.

The massive increase in carbon emissions is going to have great repercussions for our climate, and for our lives. And of course, climate policy is closely linked to energy policy, as production and use of energy represent 80% of all green house gas emissions.

In addition, with the rise of new economic giants like China and India, Europe is being exposed to increasingly intense competition for global energy resources, and is becoming ever more dependent on oil and gas imports from geopolitically uncertain regions. This, I fear, is going to be increasingly unsustainable.

But with both political will and technological developments, there is hope on the horizon. I believe we are now standing on the brink of a "Third Industrial Revolution: the Low Carbon Age" based on a sustainable and low carbon economy.

To achieve this, we will have to accelerate the shift to a low carbon energy system in line with the orientations given to us by European leaders at the Spring European Council last March.

At the same time, it will improve Europe's energy security, and decrease geopolitical tensions.

In this context I really believe that there is a need for a full and frank debate about nuclear energy. It is not the EU's role, or indeed the role of the Commission, to decide for Member States whether they use nuclear energy or not.

But it is - in my view - not surprising that we are witnessing a renewed interest of nuclear energy at global level. Nuclear energy can have a role to play in meeting our growing concerns about security of supply and CO₂ emission reductions. In the EU, around one third of the electricity currently comes from nuclear energy.

Nuclear energy also protects our economy against price volatility of energy prices, as nuclear power is less vulnerable to fuel price changes than some other energy sources. With the current record oil prices, this element is becoming increasingly important.

At the same time, I believe that in the context of the revival of nuclear energy, we need to develop further in Europe the most advanced framework for nuclear energy, meeting the highest standards of safety, security and non proliferation.

The EU should also continue their efforts to ensure that such high standards are observed internationally, in the context of increased cooperation with the IAEA.

Therefore, to repeat, while the EU as such only has a limited role to play, we can make a significant contribution to the debate in related areas, for example on research and on safety, and offer a platform for an open dialogue.

So I strongly welcome this Forum.

Indeed, there are a number of other efforts in train to improve the nuclear sector as a whole. Perhaps I could mention the first meeting of the "High Level Group on Safety and Wastes" that took place on 12 October with all Member States;

and the "Sustainable Nuclear Energy Technology Platform" launched in September.

As you can see, the Commission is ready and willing to help launching a transparent debate on nuclear energy and ensuring that the public receives relevant and reliable information on the different policy options available.

Therefore I particularly welcome the creation of the European Nuclear Energy Forum and I warmly thank the Slovak and the Czech Prime Ministers for having agreed to co-host the Forum alternatively in Bratislava and Prague.

In line with the mandate given by the Heads of State and Government in March, I trust this Forum will allow for an open and structured discussion among all key actors on the opportunities and risks of nuclear energy.

Once again, sorry I cannot be with you, but I wish every success to the new European Nuclear Energy Forum.

Thank you.»