

Sperrfrist Redebeginn  
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort



**Verleihung des  
Internationalen Karlspreises zu Aachen 2026**

**an**

**Professor Dr. Mario Draghi,  
vormaliger Präsident der Europäischen Zentralbank  
und Ministerpräsident a.D. der Italienischen Republik**

**Rede  
S.E. Kyriakos Mitsotakis  
Ministerpräsident der Hellenischen Republik**

President von der Leyen, Chancellor Merz, Lord Mayor Ziemons, Professor Draghi, dear Mario, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honor and a great privilege to be here in Aachen, a city that carries so many of Europe's memories.

Aachen reminds us that Europe has never just been a geographical construct. It has always been an idea, and more than that, it has been a choice: a choice made again and again by nations with different histories, languages, interests, and frequently painful memories, to bind their futures together.

This is why this prize matters so much. It honors those who have not only believed in Europe, but strengthened it when strength was needed most. Those who helped our Union endure moments of profound danger. Those who could see beyond the horizon and help us prepare for an uncertain future.

Today, we celebrate one of those true Europeans: Mario Draghi.

Mario, your life has been defined by intellectual seriousness, personal discipline, institutional loyalty, and the courage to lead when hesitation would have carried a much greater risk than bold action.

You have served your country and Europe as an economist, as a central banker, as President of the European Central Bank, as a Prime Minister, and now again as one of the most important voices in the debate about Europe's future.

For those of us who belong to a different generation, you have been an inspiration of what public service truly means. More than a century ago, Max Weber, in his seminal essay "Politics as a Vocation" -mandatory reading for all politicians, I would add-, wrote about the ethics of responsibility. It was this sense of responsibility towards not just your own country but towards the European project as a whole, that has always served as your moral compass.

Perhaps the deepest thread running through your long career is that you have helped Europe take a hard look at itself in the global economic and geopolitical mirror.

Europe, as you know, has always been very good at process, deliberation, and compromise. These are not weaknesses; that is how a Union of democracies works. But there are moments in history that ask for courage, boldness, and the ability to say plainly: "this is the scale of the challenge, and this is what must be done to address it".

And, of course, the most famous of those moments came in 2012. Europe was facing a crisis that was not only financial, but existential. Markets were questioning the future of the single currency. Citizens were anxious. Governments were divided. The possibility of fragmentation, once unthinkable, had become real.

Then, in London, as was said by Friedrich, Mario said the words that changed the course of the euro: "Within our mandate, the ECB is ready to do whatever it takes to preserve the euro. And believe me, it will be enough." You didn't even have to raise your voice, Mario.

And no country suffered more during the Eurozone crisis than Greece. We are not only grateful to those who saved the euro, but also to those who fought hard to convince everyone at the time that the Eurozone was only as strong as its weakest link. Thank you, Mario, for trusting us to persevere, thank you Jean-Claude, for supporting my country at a time when doubters insisted that Greece was unreformable.

The journey from the poster child of the Eurozone crisis to the presidency of the Eurogroup has been a long and painful one. But one thing is certain: the Greek people have proven worthy of Europe's trust.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, Mario Draghi is not only honored for what he did in 2012. He is also being recognized because, in recent years, he has once again told Europe what it needs to hear. In a language that is stark and welcomingly undiplomatic.

This time, the danger is different. It is not the sudden prospect of the euro collapsing. The threat is quieter, slower, and perhaps for that reason harder to confront.

It is the gradual erosion of Europe's competitiveness: the widening gap in productivity and innovation, the fragmentation of our capital and energy markets, the difficulty of scaling European companies, the dependency on others for critical technologies, energy, defense capabilities, and strategic supply chains. It is the risk that Europe becomes less the author of its future and more the spectator of decisions taken elsewhere.

This is the warning at the heart of the Draghi report. We should not treat it simply as another document to be discussed at conferences organized by think tanks. It is a wake-up call. At the same time, it is also a detailed blueprint of what is to be done.

It reminds us that economic strength is not a luxury, and competitiveness is not a narrow economic concept. These are the foundations of everything else we value: our social model, our global influence, our democracy, and the opportunities we owe the next generation.

In 2012, "whatever it takes" meant preserving the euro. Today, the question is what those words require of us today.

They require, first, that Europe restores its capacity to compete. If we do not grow, we cannot invest. If we do not innovate, we become dependent. If our companies cannot scale, our ideas will be commercialized elsewhere. And if our industrial base weakens, so will our strategic weight.

Europe must become a place where ideas can become companies, and companies can become global leaders. A place where innovation is financed, not exported. A place where industry is treated not as a relic of the past, but as a strategic asset for the future.

Second, Europe must take security seriously in the broadest sense of the term. Russia's war against Ukraine shattered the illusion that peace on our continent was an axiom never to be challenged. But security today goes well beyond defense. It includes energy, cyber resilience, borders, critical infrastructure, technology, supply chains, and the protection of our democratic institutions. A Europe that cannot protect itself cannot be fully sovereign.

Third, Europe must build real strategic autonomy. Strategic autonomy, as we've discussed numerous times at the Council, is not isolation. It is not protectionism. It is not anti-Americanism. It is not Europe turning away from its allies. On the contrary, a stronger Europe is a better ally. A more capable Europe is a more credible partner. A Europe that concludes trade deals with like-minded partners is a confident Europe.

Strategic autonomy simply means that Europe must have the capacity to make sovereign choices. We should not be permanently dependent on others for the technologies that shape our economies, the defense capabilities that protect our citizens, the energy that powers our industries, or the industrial inputs that sustain our prosperity.

Strategic autonomy is at its core an act of responsibility, self respect and long-term resilience.

This is the new meaning of "whatever it takes": competitiveness, security, and the capacity to act for ourselves.

Let me add two final points.

If we are serious about Europe's security, then our common defense must become central to our geopolitical thinking. The mutual assistance clause - Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union - provides the framework. The time has come to make it operationally credible, politically meaningful and practically usable in times of crisis.

And recent developments in the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly the swift and decisive support expressed by member states - including Greece, France, Italy, Netherlands and Spain - to Cyprus, show that this principle is not abstract. It can guide real European solidarity and action.

This is an ambitious agenda and it requires equally ambitious financing.

Private capital must play a leading role. That is why it is so important to complete the Savings and Investments Union. But public investment will also be essential. Our common priorities must be reflected in a European budget that matches our ambitions.

And where we face truly common challenges, such as energy and defense, we should remain open to common European borrowing. Because common goods justify common tools. And common challenges demand common courage and the necessary compromises. We all need to give up something in order to make the European whole stronger.

Dear Mario,

In 2012, you helped Europe believe that the euro would endure. In 2024, you challenged Europe to ensure that its prosperity, its security, and its relevance would endure as well.

Today, in Aachen, we honor that and so much more. We honor the man who helped preserve Europe in a moment of existential danger. And we honor the European who is now asking us to renew Europe before a different danger becomes irreversible.

But above all, Mario, Europe owes you gratitude not only for decisions taken in moments of crisis, but for the standard of public service you represent: courage anchored in a sense of duty, patriotism weighed in European responsibility, and a true European soul, stemming from a shared identity, an alloy between West and East, North and South.

The Charlemagne Prize is a recognition of service. But in your case, it is also a reminder to all of us. Europe is never done. Unity is never automatic. Strength is never inherited into perpetuity. Leadership means telling the truth even if it is uncomfortable. And decline is not destiny if courage arrives on time.

So, let us leave Aachen not only with gratitude, but with resolve. Let us take the warning seriously. Let us use the roadmap wisely. Let us find common ground where Europe requires compromise, let us invest where Europe requires scale, let us reform where Europe requires courage, and build where Europe requires capacity.

We don't need to reinvent ourselves. We just need to believe in ourselves. And let us prove, once again, that when Europe decides to do whatever it takes, Europe can still shape history.

Thank you.