

Beat: Politics

OPENING SPEECH BY PRESIDENT VON DER LEYEN AT THE WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

Meeting in Davos, Switzerland

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USPA NEWS - The Swiss city of Davos since Tuesday hosts the summit of the World Economic Forum, which brings together the leaders of the most developed countries in the world. The president of the European Commission, Von Der Leyen, addressed a few words of welcome to the guests at this summit. These were his words:

Thank you so much. It is such an honour and such a pleasure to be part of the opening ceremony of the 50th World Economic Forum.

Dear Klaus,

For 50 years, you have brought together here in Davos the brightest people of our times. And for 50 years, your thinking has always been ahead of times. You have always had a vision on how to shape a better future for Europe and the world. And you always wanted to bring together people from different backgrounds – the multi-stakeholder concept – you just mentioned it – which is now so essential to solve tomorrow's challenges.

50 years ago, you conceived the idea of the World Economic Forum. You were one of the first to question Europe's dependence on fossil fuels, already a few years before the great oil crisis. You were one of the first to call for more sustainable economic growth. 50 years ago indeed, you described a clash between two ideas of capitalism. These two ideas are widely known as, as you said, the shareholder capitalism and the stakeholder capitalism. The first model only cares about shareholder profit. The second – the one you always believed in – is about social responsibility. Responsibility towards workers and their families. Responsibility towards our environment. Responsibility towards society as a whole.

Your father, dear Klaus, was a friend of Ludwig Erhard, you told me. And you said that his concept of "Soziale Marktwirtschaft" – social market economy – shaped your early thinking. And this is also the political culture I do come from. And let me say, with some pride, that 50 years on, it is more needed than ever. Today, I would call it an economy that works for people. And this is what you had already in mind half a century ago. Indeed, in January 1971, when a group of European business leaders met for the very first time here in Davos, it was under the patronage of the European Commission. And they have been coming back here every January since then, setting the agenda for the year ahead.

Just as Davos has gone from strength to strength, so has its partnership with the European Commission. Back in the 1970s, great Europeans like Ralf Dahrendorf and Altiero Spinelli represented the European Commission in the Davos debates. Later, in the 1990s, Commissioner Leon Brittan was here to discuss the "moral implications of globalisation". And the debate continues. In fact, we are now exploring ways to make our partnership even closer and more fruitful for our continent. I am convinced – as you are, Klaus – that a more just and sustainable economic system is possible. For too long, humanity took away resources from the environment, and in exchange, produced waste and pollution. I believe, as you do, that we can reconcile our economy with our planet. We can reconcile human development with the protection of our home. But we can only do it together.

Dear Klaus,

Davos has always been about building international cooperation and coordination. Because sustainable progress and sustainable peace are impossible to reach without common action among nations. Davos is the place where leaders who otherwise would not even speak to each other engage in debates. Davos is the place where conflicts are averted, business is started, disputes are finished. Davos is the place where government, business and civil society join forces.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Traditionally, Davos is a call for action to politicians and CEOs. But to make a truly global impact, we need a broad engagement by

everyone. More and more, Davos is becoming a place where civil society can make its voice heard. The voice of NGOs. The voice of scientists and the academic community. The voice of young leaders who are shaking our conscience and calling for action ““ I heard you. For 50 years, the World Economic Forum has always adapted to changing times, while preserving its original spirit. The agenda for the 50th anniversary of Davos is clear. It is building a sustainable and cohesive world. It is rising to the great urgencies of today and tomorrow. We have come here today to discuss, debate and commit to solutions and new alliances, to fight climate change, to strengthen inclusive growth and to ensure peace and prosperity for all.

Dear friends,

To conclude this ceremony, the European Youth Orchestra will play our European anthem ““ the Ode to Joy. It is the perfect choice. Because when Europe celebrates, pays respect or mourns, our European anthem sounds. The words are sometimes ancient, but the meaning is timeless. The Ode to Joy praises forgiveness and reconciliation. The Ode to Joy celebrates friendship. The Ode to Joy stands for strength and unity. This is the spirit of Davos. This is what keeps bringing us together after so many years. There could be no better anthem to celebrate the World Economic Forum's 50th anniversary.

This is for you, Klaus. And it is also, from the bottom of my heart, for you Hilde. Hilde and Klaus have made Davos what it is today. We all pay tribute to this lifelong achievement.

Thank you Hilde, thank you Klaus.

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