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President of CIFE, President Emeritus of the European Council

Opening Speech on 17 October 2024

On the Occasion of the Launch of the third edition of EU*Connect

Interactive digital Campus for Participants from Ukraine, France and Germany

As president of CIFE it is a pleasure for me to deliver a short speech for the third time at the opening of our project EU Connect. With 92 participants registered, we reached the highest number since the programme was launched.

Since two years, CIFE is proud to connect young people from Ukraine, Moldova, France and Germany with a two-fold objective: to provide EU expertise for young Ukrainians and Moldovans, and to make French and German participants aware of the particular challenges of Ukraine in the context of war, its quest for EU accession and reconstruction.

For more than 60 years the European Institute CIFE has been promoting the values of Europe, European integration and governance, multilingualism and student mobility through its European and international higher education programmes.

For EU*Connect, CIFE partners with the Institute for Public Administration and Civil Service (IPACS) of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv and the Young European Federalists of JEF Berlin-Brandenburg. The program, funded by the Franco-German Youth Office and by CIFE, is 100% digital and free of charge. I would like to sincerely thank all the partners in this project. They have made it a success.

A lot has happened since our last opening. In December 2023, the European Council decided to start accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova. On June 2024 the EU held the first Intergovernmental Conference at ministerial level to open accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova. The future of both countries and its citizens lies within the European Union. There is no way back. History is on the move. This generation should be aware of that in the midst of the tragedy of the war in Ukraine.

Since last opening, we have also had European elections that produced a stable pro-European majority. Happily so in times of change. The wars in the Middle East and in Ukraine remind us how horrific these changes can be. Hopefully there will be no regime change in the US elections that could be a disaster for Ukraine and thus forbid the EU.

Policy priorities in the EU have had to adapt to changing circumstances inside and outside the Union in recent years. The war forced us to pay much more attention to defence and security. The EU also realised that it had become far too dependent on Russia and its so-called friends on energy and the new technologies. Hence the priority for strategic autonomy or sovereignty for the Union. Economic competition with China and with the US forces us to put much more emphasis on competitiveness and industrial policy. We must combine this with as much respect as possible for the Green Deal, that other priority of the previous legislature. Security, autonomy, climate and

competitiveness now top the list of priorities. Choices within that framework will impose themselves. However, one thing is clear: to live up to this list, we need more Europe, not less Europe.

At the moment we need the EU most, more than 20% of MEPs tell a different story. It is more than a paradox.

France and Germany should cooperate more again because without them there is no real engine for more Europe. This is needed now that so much is at stake.

The three pillars of the Union: the passport-free Schengen area, the eurozone and the single market all need to be strengthened rather than weakened or neglected as is happening today. We know perfectly well what to do and yet we are stagnating in much-needed reforms. European interest should take precedence over national interest. Besides, what does that national interest still mean in times of globalisation and in the midst of a digital revolution? After all, there are no more big EU countries in a global context. It is a fact of life.

Participants in this programme will learn all these problems and come out of it as true Europeans. Later, they will be better able to put European beliefs into practice. There will never be enough Europeanists. Join the club. I wish you an exciting course. Let us also hope that by next year we will see a return of peace in freedom on our continent. I remain a man of hope.

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