

Juncker says EU 'in a better place now than in 2014' in final speech

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Outgoing European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker has ended his mandate on a positive note by describing the bloc as being 'in a better place now' than five years ago.



Jean-Claude Juncker | *Photo credit: European Parliament Audiovisual*

Speaking in Brussels on Thursday, he reflected on his time at the helm of the Commission - five years of successes and failures, of unprecedented challenges and crises - but with a "firm conviction that Europe is in a better place now than it was in 2014."

Listing the Commission's accomplishments during his mandate, Juncker said that Greece is still in the eurozone, and today, is "back on its feet" despite the worst socio-economic crisis to hit Europe in decades.

Another gain, he said, was that 11 million new jobs have been created, the European Pillar of Social Rights has become a reality, and “most importantly” the EU has managed to regain citizens' trust, which, he reminded the audience, was at an all-time low in 2014.

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The most divisive issue was migration, he told the European Policy Centre Thought Leadership Forum, adding that he was “proud to say” he had consistently advocated the importance of saving lives and opening up legal pathways for refugees to come to Europe.

Juncker said he “regretted” that he was unable to achieve all he wanted but he also believed the EU did make important progress, pointing out that since 2015, it has taken in more refugees than Australia, Canada and the US combined.

He branded the Brexit saga as “of course, the most difficult and disappointing moment” in his five-year mandate, which is due to end on November 1.

“It has been the honour of my life to serve the European Union” **Jean-Claude Juncker**

He said Brexit was “a shame” and could have “acted as a catalyst for others to leave and split the EU for ever.”

“But unity prevailed”, he went on, “although this took a lot more negotiating and work than people realise.”

He said that the Commission had succeeded in getting the Union back on track, adding, “Today we are looking at a different Europe; a stronger and more resilient continent, slowly finding its way in the world. But I think that we are also seen by others as a different Union.”

During his mandate, he said, the Union has emerged as an economic superpower, ushering in a new generation of trade agreements which, although heavily critiqued by the public, reflect European values, from the way they are negotiated to the high environmental and labour standards they uphold.

“The world knows it can count on us to defend the multilateral rule-based order,” he said.

“Take care of Europe, and let's make sure that it stays an open continent. Remember to be patriotic, not nationalistic” **Jean-Claude Juncker**

Juncker also said he was “unhappy” with the European Council's decision at last week’s EU summit not to start accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia, adding that if the EU wants to be taken seriously, “we have to keep our promises to our partners.”

Closing his speech, he said he had done his best, and that “it has been the honour of my life to serve the European Union.”

Asked by Janis Emmanouilidis, director of studies at the EPC, if he could offer one last piece of advice to the audience and Europeans, Juncker replied: “Take care of Europe, and let's make sure that it stays an open continent. Remember to be patriotic, not nationalistic.”

EPC president Herman Van Rompuy lauded Juncker's leadership and “balanced judgement.”

About the author

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