Mr Chairman,

‘No more war’ is what the European Union has helped achieve in the last 55 years. It has done this of course in association, crucially, with the Atlantic alliance, NATO. But the contribution of the EU itself has been heroic.

I compare my teenage years with those of the present generation 40 years on. Then, for many who had lived through the war, the still visceral suspicions of the Germans, the Austrians, the Italians; the fact of fascist dictatorships in Spain, Portugal and Greece, and the Communist dictatorships across Central and Eastern Europe; the passport, customs and exchange controls. Today: democracy; free movement for millions across Europe; a common currency in 12 countries; a Single Market soon to embrace half a billion consumers; common action to combat threats to our environment and our security. And, more than just the absence of war, the EU has established powerful values for good: it is these values which have provided a sense of direction for the former Communist states when the experience of their neighbours in the Balkans shows the route they could have taken.

The EU has also helped create a nascent sense of common identity among its citizens and nations: the idea that people can be Europeans as well as citizens of their own nation state, and that nations operate more effectively as partners, not rivals.

Mr Chairman,

Our citizens expect their national governments to ensure their security and prosperity. But in many respects, this can no longer be done through measures which apply only within our national boundaries, if ever it could. On one issue after another – crime, asylum, the environment and many others – we have to work across national boundaries: but these days we do this most effectively not just by co-operating, but by pooling sovereignty.

Indeed today, to an increasing degree, pooling sovereignty helps us strengthen our significance as nations. It is at the supranational level that we can achieve our goals in a way which is no longer possible at the national level.

As a sovereign state, our strength is enhanced by the strength of our alliances: our security and prosperity depend on our ability to influence events in the rest of our continent and the rest of the world, not on our ability to stop others from influencing us.

Working with our partners in the EU strengthens British democracy, and Dutch democracy, and French, Danish and Portuguese democracy, and in future Polish, Czech and Slovenian democracy, because it enables national governments to do what they are elected to do. It shows our peoples that their political choices can make a difference.
So there is no sense in which the identity of nations has been diminished in the EU. Indeed, nations have become more confident and therefore more relaxed about themselves. Because of this, there has been a greater readiness to celebrate diversity within nation states by conceding greater regional autonomy – as for example we have seen in Spain and the UK, both of which are nation states of long standing.

The eminent military historian, Sir Michael Howard, in his essay *The Invention of Peace*, asserted that ‘the (nation) state not only makes war possible: it also makes peace possible’. This is because the nation state is an idea which has delivered strong institutions and is comprehended by its citizens in an instinctive way. It can therefore deliver and sustain a peace with other nations. So for all the turbulence there has been in history between the states of Europe, there is a fundamental acceptance of their existence, and of the way they operate.

The position is, however, different for the EU. The Laeken Declaration rightly highlighted the ‘disconnect’ between Europe’s institutions and its citizens. Across Europe, the turnout in elections to the European Parliament has fallen below 50%. Referenda in Denmark and in Ireland have reflected a disenchantment with the EU.

The reasons generally for this disenchantment are many and complex, but I would like to offer one possible line of analysis. If I can compare Europe to a motor car, then I would say that it is becoming more reliable at getting us to where we want to go. But it does still seem to spend an awful lot of time in the garage. Because we have not yet got the mechanics of the EU right, we still use up too much time and energy on the processes and not enough on the outcomes; whilst our citizens want the reverse. For they care less about institutional debates than about things like jobs, the economy, safe food, crime, a clean environment.