

"United we stand, divided we fall": letter by President Donald Tusk to the 27 EU heads of state or government on the future of the EU before the Malta summit

Dear colleagues,

In order to best prepare our discussion in Malta about the future of the European Union of 27 member states, and in light of the conversations I have had with some of you, let me put forward a few reflections that I believe most of us share.

The challenges currently facing the European Union are more dangerous than ever before in the time since the signature of the Treaty of Rome. Today we are dealing with three threats, which have previously not occurred, at least not on such a scale.

The first threat, an external one, is related to the new geopolitical situation in the world and around Europe. An increasingly, let us call it, assertive China, especially on the seas, Russia's aggressive policy towards Ukraine and its neighbours, wars, terror and anarchy in the Middle East and in Africa, with radical Islam playing a major role, as well as worrying declarations by the new American administration all make our future highly unpredictable. For the first time in our history, in an increasingly multipolar external world, so many are becoming openly anti-European, or Eurosceptic at best. Particularly the change in Washington puts the European Union in a difficult situation; with the new administration seeming to put into question the last 70 years of American foreign policy.

The second threat, an internal one, is connected with the rise in anti-EU, nationalist, increasingly xenophobic sentiment in the EU itself. National egoism is also becoming an attractive alternative to integration. In addition, centrifugal tendencies feed on mistakes made by those, for whom ideology and institutions have become more important than the interests and emotions of the people.

The third threat is the state of mind of the pro-European elites. A decline of faith in political integration, submission to populist arguments as well as doubt in the fundamental values of liberal democracy are all increasingly visible.

In a world full of tension and confrontation, what is needed is courage, determination and political solidarity of Europeans. Without them we will not survive. If we do not believe in ourselves, in the deeper purpose of integration, why should anyone else? In Rome we should renew this declaration of faith. In today's world of states-continentals with hundreds of millions of inhabitants, European countries taken separately have little weight. But the EU has demographic and economic potential, which makes it a partner equal to the largest powers. For this reason, the most important signal that should come out of Rome is that of readiness of the 27 to be united. A signal that we not only must, but we want to be united.

Let us show our European pride. If we pretend we cannot hear the words and we do not notice the decisions aimed against the EU and our future, people will stop treating Europe as their wider homeland. Equally dangerously, global partners will cease to respect us. Objectively speaking, there is no reason why Europe and its leaders should pander to external powers and their rulers. I know that in politics, the argument of dignity must not be overused, as it often leads to conflict and negative emotions. But today we must stand up very clearly for our dignity, the dignity of a united Europe - regardless of whether we are talking to Russia, China, the US or Turkey. Therefore, let us have the courage to be proud of our own achievements, which have made our continent the best place on Earth. Let us have the courage to oppose the rhetoric of demagogues, who claim that European integration is beneficial only to the elites, that ordinary people have only suffered as its result, and that countries will cope better on their own, rather than together.

We must look to the future - this was your most frequent request in our consultations over the past months. And there is no doubt about it. But we should never, under any circumstances, forget about the most important reasons why 60 years ago we decided to unite Europe. We often hear the argument that the memory of the past tragedies of a divided Europe is no longer an argument, that new generations do not remember the sources of our inspiration. But amnesia does not invalidate these inspirations, nor does it relieve us of our duty to continuously recall the tragic lessons of a divided Europe. In Rome, we should strongly reiterate these two basic, yet forgotten, truths: firstly, we have united in order to avoid another historic catastrophe, and secondly, that the times of European unity have been the best times in all of Europe's centuries-long history. It must be made

crystal clear that the disintegration of the European Union will not lead to the restoration of some mythical, full sovereignty of its member states, but to their real and factual dependence on the great superpowers: the United States, Russia and China. Only together can we be fully independent.

We must therefore take assertive and spectacular steps that would change the collective emotions and revive the aspiration to raise European integration to the next level. In order to do this, we must restore the sense of external and internal security as well as socio-economic welfare for European citizens. This requires a definitive reinforcement of the EU external borders; improved cooperation of services responsible for combating terrorism and protecting order and peace within the border-free area; an increase in defence spending; strengthening the foreign policy of the EU as a whole as well as better coordinating individual member states' foreign policies; and last but not least fostering investment, social inclusion, growth, employment, reaping the benefits of technological change and convergence in both the euro area and the whole of Europe.

We should use the change in the trade strategy of the US to the EU's advantage by intensifying our talks with interested partners, while defending our interests at the same time. The European Union should not abandon its role as a trade superpower which is open to others, while protecting its own citizens and businesses, and remembering that free trade means fair trade. We should also firmly defend the international order based on the rule of law. We cannot surrender to those who want to weaken or invalidate the Transatlantic bond, without which global order and peace cannot survive. We should remind our American friends of their own motto:

United we stand, divided we fall

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