



European Council  
The President

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**Speech by Donald Tusk, President of the European Council  
to the European Parliament  
Strasbourg, January 13th 2015**

Here, in the Parliament of European citizens, on French soil, I want to honour the victims of Paris attacks.

We all stand with France and the French people. We will not forget. We will not fear.

Three messengers of death cannot, will not, intimidate millions of people of good will. That is exactly what we proved in Paris last Sunday. May this brutal act only strengthen our unity, in defence of our liberty, of our solidarity, and of our laughter.

Dear Members,

I last stood here, in the European Parliament, in 2011 as Prime Minister of Poland. Today, it is my duty and my pleasure to brief this Parliament as the President of the European Council.

After an overview of the meeting in December, I will sketch out the work ahead, and give you some of my ideas about our Union. You will find that they have not changed since the last time I spoke here.

Distinguished Members,

As you know, to defend everything is to defend nothing. If you have ten priorities, you have none. That is why in December I invited leaders to focus on just two crucially important issues, needing our immediate attention. These are:

*Injecting investment into the European economy;*

*And the situation at our Eastern borders with Ukraine and Russia.*

On investment and growth. We discussed and agreed the plan to establish a European Fund for Strategic Investment.

Today, the Commission presented it in more detail. At our meeting, leaders gave their support and set a firm timeline. Now it is for you, as legislators along with the Council, to ensure that the Fund is ready by June.

The aim, *as you know*, is to unlock billions of new investments into the European economy. The European Investment Bank can already start signing off the first projects this month.

This investment plan will complement our economic strategy based on sound public finances and structural reforms. Of course I know as well as you that the Investment Plan is not a silver bullet but only part of our efforts. If anyone has an idea how to overcome the crisis at one stroke, please speak up. Personally, I am convinced that we still need constant work and many ideas, because the economic Philosopher's stone simply does not exist.

We also agreed on stepping up the fight against tax avoidance and aggressive tax planning. It is an important issue – and not only for public finances; it is also a matter of fairness and social justice. We will come back to it in June.

Regarding the situation in Ukraine and in Russia, leaders had a frank strategic exchange. For the sanctions, we agreed that the best thing for now is to 'stay the course'. We will decide the next steps in March.

Meanwhile, we will support Ukraine and its government, also financially. The more we help the 'new Ukraine', the better our own future is going to be.

That is why we discussed more financial aid for Ukraine. Last week, the Commission proposed lending a further 1.8 billion euros to Ukraine. Leaders also welcomed the intention to **increase** humanitarian aid. Ukrainians must know and see that Europe is with them.

Dear members,

I also took the opportunity at the December meeting – the first of my presidency – to set out a clear agenda for the months ahead.

In February, leaders will discuss ways to improve governance in our Economic and Monetary Union. I also decided, after consulting with the French President, that the February European Council will deal with the challenge posed by the Paris attacks.

In March, we will discuss the European economy, the energy union, and our approach towards Russia, also in the context of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga in May.

In June, we will take decisions on the digital single market and review the Investment Fund.

Going back to December briefly, the European Council also discussed foreign fighters and the Passenger Name Record issue in the presence of President Schulz.

We know this is a difficult and delicate topic. This Parliament has rightly taken seriously its role in defending the freedoms of European citizens. But I also ask you to help us protect the security of those who elected this chamber.

Yet again we are facing the ever-lasting dilemma between security and freedom. And yet again we must find a wise balance between these two fundamental needs.

If we are unable to build a coherent security policy for the Union, sooner or later we will put at risk the freedoms that we have built at the European level, including Schengen. Under my watch, I do not want to see that happen.

If we do not get a single European PNR, we may end up with 28 national ones. National systems would be a patchwork with holes. They would interfere with the privacy of citizens but not properly protect their security. One European system is clearly better for security and freedom. That was true in December; unfortunately, it is even more true today.

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Distinguished members,

We do not have the privilege to live in boring times. These are tough, political times. This is the time, when the Europe our children will inherit is being decided on, day by day.

That is why, first, we must be clear about our fundamental values: solidarity, freedom, human dignity, including the right to live free from fear. That also means fighting the enemies of these values - whoever and wherever they are.

Second, we need strong determination to end the economic crisis, especially to reduce unemployment. It is also our responsibility to create a genuine Economic and Monetary Union. I take this task very seriously. Our common currency, the euro, is our advantage. The decision of Lithuania to become the 19th member of the eurozone is a sign of confidence in the currency.

Third, the European Union must be strong internationally. We will support those in the neighbourhood who share our values. The European Union will not close its eyes when borders on our continent are changed by force. We have stood united on this issue and will continue to do so. Only unity can bring us results.

Lastly, the relations between Europe and the United States are a cornerstone of our prosperity and freedom. In this context I believe one of the most important challenges is to make progress in the negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. Leaders were clear in December. The EU and the US should make all efforts to conclude negotiations on a comprehensive, ambitious and mutually beneficial agreement by the end of 2015.

For all of these things, all European institutions must work together for the common good, while respecting the role each is here to play.

We will conquer the challenges facing us with energy and optimism, or not at all. Certainly, no European nation, no single state, can conquer them alone. For my part, I will use all the skills I have to keep the work of the European Council results-oriented and focused on what really matters.

For a long time now, I have observed that the institutions compete with one another. It is my personal ambition to change this to total cooperation. The first weeks of my work together with Martin, Jean-Claude and Federica, prove that it is possible.

Dear members,

A few words to conclude.

I do not think Europe is old, haggard or barren. I have no doubt: Europe is young, dynamic and vital. Our continent remains the best place in the world to live. And I think the European Union is the best political organisation in its history. A political organisation, which means that it is a tool in our hands, not a despot, nor a destination.

There are some here who do not wish the Union well. Perhaps I could say I respect that, but I do not. If we undo the European Union, no-one will be freer. No-one will be better off. No-one will be safer.

I believed in Europe when the Polish Solidarity movement was born in 1980. I believed in Europe when the Wall came down in 1989. I still believed when I spoke here as Prime Minister in 2011.

Dear members, I still believe in Europe today.

I want a Europe of free citizens, united, internally secure, safe from external threats and confident about its future. We must remember that Europe is a real community of nations and peoples. That is why we must not be afraid of tensions among us. They are often productive and creative.

Equally, we often get better when we agree to disagree.

I am sure in this room we have a difference of opinion on the cartoons of Charlie Hebdo. But as Europeans we share the fundamental view that no one has a right to use violence or murder people because they have a different religion or a different sense of humour.

Just like, for instance, we have in this room different views about Russia and different interests with Russia. But no-one here, I deeply believe, will ever accept that a state invades and occupies the territory of another state or kills its citizens.

Politics is about the disagreement we allow to play out on the rock of our principles.

However, we will never get anywhere without recognising that the fates of Europeans, all of us, are fundamentally bound together.

That is why I stand here today.

Thank you.

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