

Speech by President Donald Tusk at the opening ceremony of the Romanian Presidency

I am very proud and happy that in this first half of 2019 I will be managing our common, European matters together with you, as part of your first ever EU presidency. I am sure that you will be performing your own 'Romanian Rhapsody' with energy and wisdom during these six months. That your presidency will be as energetic, as Romanian and as European as the music of George Enescu. And I do not say this just because we are at the Athenaeum tonight. But because I know how resilient and creative the Romanian nation is. I feel that you will do your very best in 'conducting' the orchestra, creating the right sound and working as a team with the European interest in mind.

You will be the hosts of Europe and I strongly believe that you will take the proverb, *a good farmer makes a good farm*, seriously. I also believe that you will play by the rules. In a fast-changing world, in which the future will surprise us every day, following the rules and being attached to principles will play a particular role. You will all remember the beautiful poem by Nichita Stănescu:

*The future is approaching, I can hear it, I can see it
The thoughts I send its way
return faster than ever.
And sparks keep shooting through my soul
broadcasting its arrival.*

To a large degree it will now be up to Romania, how, and if, Europe will overcome the challenges of the future. It depends only on you, whether, for Europe, Romanian politics will be a good example, or a dire warning. What is at stake during the Romanian Presidency, as well as the informal European Council in Sibiu, is nothing less than the way we envisage our European future together. To those in the European Union who might think that playing outside the agreed rules and cutting corners means strength, I say: you are wrong. It means weakness. To those working hard to defend European values, our freedoms and rights, I say: keep fighting. Remember that there will always be challenges and, sometimes, 'light does not come from light, but from darkness', as Mircea Eliade once put it. And when 'all obstacles seem like walls, the issue is to treat them as mirrors or windows', in the words of Andrei Pleșu.

Romania has the power to fascinate and enchant. The first car in our family was a grey Dacia 1300 of my father-in-law. Interestingly, today my son's father-in-law also drives a Dacia Duster. To me, however, Romanian cars have been less fascinating than Romanian intellectuals and sports personalities. Mircea Eliade, whom I quoted earlier, Emil Cioran, the Dadaist Tristan Tzara, Eugen Ionescu – they are all heroes of my imagination. And so are the athletes, who have delighted audiences around the globe, such as Nadia Comăneci and Simona Halep. But what has left the greatest imprint on my memory was the 1986 European Cup final in Sevilla, that is the victory of Steaua Bucharest over Barcelona. And I would like to appeal to all Romanians, to defend, at home and in Europe, the foundations of our political civilisation – freedom, integrity, the truth in public life, the rule of law and the constitution – with the same determination as Helmut Duckadam when he defended penalty shots. Back then I also couldn't believe it possible to save 4 penalties in a row! But he made it. And also you will make it. I will help you with this as much as I can.

(The speech was delivered in Romanian)