

Speech by President Donald Tusk at the event marking the 40th anniversary of European People Party (EPP)

Dear President Joseph Daul, dear friends,

People celebrate anniversaries in order to remember. What should we, Christian Democrats, remember when we celebrate the fortieth anniversary of our political community? First and foremost, we should remember why we are together, and what the real reason behind creating a one-party family was. Today we often refer to ourselves as a party of results, not a party of ideology but this is too little to survive in good shape for the next forty years. The need for a deeper reflection of a historical, ideological and political nature is obvious. Proud as we are of our pragmatism, we must also remember that pragmatism itself does not constitute the foundations of our community.

Today, I want to tell you about the three, to my mind, most important challenges currently facing the European People's Party. First, we must redefine our fundamental catalogue of values, the minimum of Christian democracy, so to speak. And by this I do not mean the need for some ideological inventions, but rather a conscious and very seriously taken return to our roots.

It has been forty years exactly since I started my studies at the University of Gdańsk. It was precisely at the same time when the communists once again brutally crushed workers' protests and strikes in several Polish cities. In reaction to those events, a small group of Warsaw intellectuals and dissidents established the so-called KOR, the Workers' Defense Committee, an initiative to help the imprisoned, the injured and those thrown out of work. Illegal students' committees were also being set up at some universities. We didn't know at the time that four years later the great 10-million-strong Solidarity movement would come to life.

When I set up such an underground student committee at my University in 1977, I was not thinking about politics as an art of achieving results. It was difficult to call that activity pragmatic, as it was strictly connected with taking a risk. On the other hand, however, it was an exciting experience, if not mystical. And that's because in those days ethics came before politics, or, to put it differently, political engagement was a result of exclusively ethical motives. Paradoxically, this is precisely what in the longer-term perspective became a source of strength and effectiveness.

It was also then that we were discovering forbidden words and ideas: liberty, democracy, freedom of religion and expression, the rule of law, free market and private property. It is not a feeling of nostalgia that makes me go back to the old times, but a deep conviction that those values are still relevant in the Christian democratic minimum. Do they sound old-fashioned and banal? They do. But this is where their strength lies. We do not need further constructivist and progressive ideologies. Socialists are much better at this. Let us again believe in those ideas which are rooted in our tradition of freedom, in the Decalogue, in our hearts and experiences. What we lack today is a new energy and genuine determination to defend them.

Second, persistent in our commitment to fundamental principles, we must be guided in our political projects by common sense and a good sense of timing. It is us who today are responsible for confronting reality with all kinds of utopias. A utopia of Europe without nation states, a utopia of Europe without conflicting interests and ambitions, a utopia of Europe imposing its own values on the external world. A utopia of a Euro-Asian unity.

Obsessed with the idea of instant and total integration, we failed to notice that ordinary people, the citizens of Europe do not share our Euro-enthusiasm. Disillusioned with the great visions of the future, they demand that we cope with the present reality better than we have been doing until now. Today, Euro-scepticism, or even Euro-pessimism have become an alternative to those illusions. And increasingly louder are those who question the very principle of a united Europe. The spectre of a break-up is haunting Europe and a vision of a federation doesn't seem to me like the best answer to it. We need to understand the necessity of the historical moment. As the President of the European Council I want to start an honest and open debate on the subject. The sixtieth anniversary of the Treaty of Rome provides a good background for such a debate.

The third challenge concerns ourselves. Let me be absolutely blunt when I tell you what I think about the internal situation in the

EPP, in our political party. Before I start, however, I want to make an important declaration: I am terribly proud to be in the same party with such people as Joseph Daul and Angela Merkel, as Viktor Orban and Manfred Weber, as Jean-Claude Juncker and Boyko Borissov. That they are different from each other is clear. Just look at Boyko and Jean-Claude. But differences should not mean conflicts. There is space in the EPP for different sensitivities and different tactics as long as we share the same values and a common strategy. When you look at it objectively, there is no conflict between the idea of strict respect for the rules, e.g. Schengen, and solidarity with the refugees. In addition to that, Europe needs a wise synthesis of those two values. If we succeed in building it, people will believe that we are able to cope with this or another crisis. Speaking openly, we will either understand that the views of Angela and Viktor are compatible with each other and only together can they provide a full answer, or people will search for other radical and brutal recipes for how to solve the crisis. We have to look for what we share, and not underline our differences. That is why let us refrain from exaggerated rhetoric, because exaggeration, in whichever direction, is a heavy sin in politics.

If we want a united Europe, a Europe of Solidarity, we must start with ourselves. One of the great moral authorities, John Paul the Second said that Solidarity is never one against the other. Solidarity is always one with the other, together. When one is a Christian Democrat, it is sometimes worth listening to the Pope.

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