

Speech by President Donald Tusk at the EPP Malta congress 2017

Dear friends, I am sure that by now you've had enough of speeches, so let me share just one reflection but, in my opinion, a key one.

Five days ago in Rome, right before signing the Rome Declaration, I said, "Europe as a political entity will either be united, or will not be at all. Only a united Europe can be a sovereign Europe in relation to the rest of the world. And only a sovereign Europe guarantees independence for its nations, guarantees freedom for its citizens. The unity of Europe is not a bureaucratic model. It is a set of common values and democratic standards. Today it is not enough to call for unity and to protest against multiple speeds. It is much more important that we all respect our common rules such as human rights and civil liberties, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, checks and balances, and the rule of law. This is the true foundation of our unity".

And yesterday, right after receiving the letter from Prime Minister Theresa May, invoking Article 50, I said that "paradoxically, there is also something positive in Brexit. Brexit has made us, the community of 27, more determined and more united than before. I am fully confident of this, especially after the Rome Declaration, and I can say that we will remain determined and united also in the future, also during the difficult negotiations ahead.

Those two statements are connected by one thought, by one conviction: that the key to our future is in the unity and sovereignty of Europe. In recent years, Europeans - from Warsaw to London, from Athens to Helsinki - have been made to believe that an integrating Europe is a threat to national and state sovereignty.

That the European Union, that Brussels, are demanding a reduction of patriotism. That, as we integrate within the EU, we must sacrifice our sovereignty. That we are losing control over our own fate, as we delegate part of our powers to the European Community. That by strengthening this community, we inevitably weaken the national one. That it's becoming more and more difficult to reconcile being Europeans and patriots. This was in fact the main theme of anti-EU campaigns in the UK, and in many other places. Virtually in the whole of Europe.

This is a view which is both foolish and dangerous. Our mission should be to make Europeans realise that it's exactly the opposite. That a strong EU, capable of being sovereign in relation to the external world, capable of protecting its catalogue of values and culture, capable of protecting its external border, is the best, and perhaps the only guarantee of national and state sovereignty. Today's world has swept away the illusion that everyone wants to emulate European cultural and political standards. The migration crisis, Russian aggression in Ukraine, events in Turkey, Brexit and many other events show that proclaiming the "end of history", proclaiming the ultimate triumph of liberal democracy, peace and international order, have turned out to be - to put it mildly - exaggerated. For rational and responsible patriots who want to maintain sovereignty and independence of their nations and states, there is no alternative to a united and sovereign Europe.

We must challenge the populists. We must say loud and clear that nationalisms and separatisms which try to weaken the EU are the opposite of modern patriotism. Those who take aim at European unity, threaten also their own communities, weakening their own state sovereignty.

Words such as security, sovereignty, dignity and pride must return to our political dictionary. There is no reason why, in public debate, extremists and populists should have a monopoly on these terms. Today they are efficiently and cynically taking advantage of social fears and uncertainty, building their own model of security on prejudice, authoritarianism and organised hatred. Our response must be clear and decisive.

Firstly, there is no contradiction between liberal democracy and the need for order and security. Only free and law-abiding societies can truly be safe.

Secondly, there is no contradiction between a Europe which is integrated and sovereign in relation to the external world, and the independence of our nations and countries. Quite the opposite: the more Europe is united, the more it is sovereign, and therefore

capable of protecting sovereign nations.

Thirdly, moderation, common sense and political rationalism do not stand in contradiction to force, courage and determination. People want authority which is wise, moral and strong all at the same time. And this is the right role for the EPP. This is your role. Thank you.

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