

Statement by Prime Minister Donald Tusk

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Transcript

- Madam President. Dear friends. "Europe has not yet perished, so long as we still live". This paraphrase of the words of the Polish anthem probably captures the mood well. A mood felt in every corner of our globe. A mood of uncertainty, sometimes disorientation.

- We can talk about a certain crisis of spirit today. Today, if you allow me, I would like to share with you a reflection that is a bit deeper than just the specific tasks the Polish presidency is facing. **Everyone here in the European Parliament, or at least those of you who are interested in the details of the Polish presidency programme, has certainly familiarised themselves with it.** You know that we have considered security to be the most important. And that the motto of this presidency is "Security Europe", because it is also an attempt to respond to this moment of global hesitation, what our future will be, here in Europe, in the individual member states of the European Union, the entire political civilisation, the civilisation of the West.

- We live in conditions of conflict right on our borders. Rapid and sometimes uncontrolled, especially by ordinary people, civilisational progress - all this causes some of the citizens of Europe to feel as if they have lost ground under their feet. So we are talking about a crisis of certain positive emotions and a crisis of spirit, but objectively speaking, Europe has no reason for complexes. Today, perhaps the most important words that should be said here in the European Parliament are words addressed directly to European women and men - "lift your heads high".

- Europe was, is and will be great. Europe is, Europe was, and Europe will always be great.

- And this is not about political slogans. How often do we forget that the European Union is 450 million people, 27 proud nation states that have been able for years, are able today and will be able tomorrow to agree, sometimes in difficult processes, but to agree on a common position. And this at such critical moments as the financial, energy, migration, terrorist crises, the pandemic, the war on our eastern border. See how diligently, with what determination the European nations, member states, institutions, the European Union as a whole approach these challenges. And there is really no reason for Europe today, especially today, to consider that we have found ourselves in some absurd, existential troubles and problems.

- Yes, there have been some massive changes that reinforce this sense of uncertainty. But let me draw on my many years of experience. I addressed this Parliament here during the first Polish presidency. I spoke to you many times when I was President of the European Council. And I remember those moments of crisis and doubt very well. And I remember very well how we managed. We differ in many ways in this chamber. We have the left here, more or less radical movements, still a large political centre. We argue in our national parliaments. We conduct fierce election campaigns. But we are able, as Europeans, to find, or to rediscover every day, every year, this common space. After all, it is this that creates this sense of community.

- Some elements of this community are questioned, but this sense, the general sense of political community, means that, among other things, you are here, in this chamber, all together. Regardless of the parties you represent.

- Let's call a spade a spade. This, some believe, revolutionary political change in the United States has caused a certain political disorientation in many European countries. There have been certain words, political declarations that justify this sense of disorientation or uncertainty among some politicians. But they in no way excuse or justify this decline of the European spirit.

- That's right. What is happening around us, what is happening in Europe, but above all around us; what is happening in the geopolitical dimension, poses completely new challenges for Europe. But Europe is there to face such challenges.

- Listen, when we hear the leaders of other countries, we all listened carefully, for example to the inaugural speech of President Donald Trump. And the leaders of other countries, other powers speak with pride and satisfaction about the achievements of their countries, about tradition, about the great past and the great future. Europe has the right to speak just as bluntly, just as loudly, with the same conviction about its greatness, from the past, the present and about its faith in the great future of our continent and our Union. We just have to open our eyes wide and not take offense at the change in circumstances.

- Listen, let's take this key issue, which is security today, because it is not only the Polish presidency that considers it a priority. We all know that security in various dimensions is the most important from the point of view of the daily life of every European, our nation states and the Union as a whole.

- I want to tell you that if we believe that the change of the American administration and other circumstances is in some sense a leap into the unknown, then let us remember that Europe built its greatness because it was never afraid to go into this unknown with its head held high.

- When I listen to other leaders, other world powers, recall these great moments of their history, I want to tell you that we should also always have in our collective memory these great events that decided the fate of the world and that were born here in Europe.

- Europe was the continent from which the greatest explorers, inventors, strategists came. And we were never afraid of this uncertainty. We were never afraid of jumping into the unknown. It does not have to be a curse. Let's treat it as a challenge, also as an opportunity for Europe. We can once again be the most competitive in the whole world, not only in the economy, but also in politics, because in the past we have always been creative, courageous, we were not afraid of the uncertain. Whether it was Alexander the Great, whether it was Christopher Columbus, whether it was the Vikings, or the discoverers of America, nomen, omen. Dear ones, this is our history. This is Europe.

- The time of comfort is over - we all know that. If today the President of the United States speaks about the need for Europe, for American allies, for greater responsibility for their own security - let's treat it as a positive challenge.

- I want to tell you that only an ally can really wish for its ally to be stronger. Do not treat this as a statement by an opponent of Europe. In the matter of alliances, cooperation for the security of the Western world, the European Union, the United States, Canada, the entire NATO - we must still try not only to speak a common language, but also to take action. And today, Europe must take such action.

- When I listen to the statements from the ocean, I believe that none of you, none here in Europe, should be irritated by some suggestions or indications. A paraphrase of Kennedy's famous words comes to mind: "Ask, not what America can do for Europe and its security - ask, what we ourselves can do for it". Do not ask America anymore what it can do for our security. Ask yourselves what you, what we, can do for our security.

- I am convinced that the European Union, the nation states, the member states of the European Union, will be the most valuable ally, also from Washington's point of view, if we take security issues into our own hands, if we stand on our own feet, if we open our heads, open our eyes wide and see - where is the threat, where is the enemy, what we did not do, where were the omissions, where are the sources of our - as some say - weakness.

- I wouldn't talk about weakness, because as I said, we potentially can be a power equal to the biggest ones. We have the same share of world GDP as the United States. When we talk about the threat from Russia today, Europe... I have to tell you, when I hear some statements, it's pathetic to the point that some in Europe have complexes about, I don't know: the Russian economy, Russian science, the potential - what potential? - demographics, ethics.

- We have to believe in our strength again. This potential is a fact. We are strong, equal to the biggest world powers, we just have to believe it. And the facts are really on our side. If

we talk about external security, this priority of European security consists of seven elements - that's how we designed it for the Polish presidency.

- External security. Listen, some people think it's extravagance, or some kind of brutal admonition, or malice, when we hear that we should spend maybe 5 percent on our security.

- I want to tell you that this is a time when Europe cannot save on security. I am speaking as the Prime Minister of a country that already spends almost 5% on security. And I want to say that it spends these 5% not only on its own security, but on the security of all of Europe. Well, because it so happens that Poland has this long border with Russia, with Belarus and this friendly border with Ukraine, but in a sense a war border with Ukraine.

- I want to emphasise this clearly. I know that the Polish presidency will not decide on this here, but this is a passionate appeal to everyone to reject routine thinking. If Europe is to survive, it must be armed. This is not our choice. I am not a militarist. Poland is a place on earth where no one wants any repetition of any war. We suffered the most in Europe during this terrible war. But maybe that is why we understand so well that in order to avoid this tragic repetition of history, we must all be strong, armed, determined. Strong in spirit, but also strong in our defense capabilities. So do not underestimate this call for 5 percent.

- Let's think flexibly, let's be creative, because today is the day when we need to radically increase defense spending. After all, not forever and ever, not forever, but at some point we should start spending significantly more money, as nation states, as NATO member states, but also as the European Union, as a whole. That's what today is.

- Perhaps, and I say this with full conviction, as the Polish Prime Minister, as a European, also as a historian, if we do not want to spend so much money in the future on security, on armaments, on defense, then we have to invest more money today. Therefore, think about it seriously. Not only the future of Ukraine, the region, but the whole of Europe depends on it. In a sense, the future of the whole world as we know it depends on it. On our defense capabilities, regardless of who wants to help us and who wants to harm us.

- Internal security. I remember how many years ago, from this rostrum, as the President of the European Council, I warned against a naive approach to the threat of illegal migration. And among other things, some in the chamber in this Parliament sometimes reacted with anger, sometimes with laughter, when, contrary to what some people said, Europe should be a continent without borders, open to all illegal and legal immigrants. It was then that I said that this is a category, you know, from the category of responsibility, the most important responsibility that every authority has for a safe border and a safe territory.

- If democracy is to survive, if European values, about which I will say a word in a moment, are to survive, then it cannot be that ordinary people associate democracy with

helplessness, with helplessness when it comes to these classic tasks for every government, which are the defense of the border and the defense of the territory.

- Do you know why we talk so often about the crisis of trust in traditional politics in Europe? Do you know why political shamans or political lunatics so often come to the fore, saying that the traditional model of European democracy is worthless, should be thrown out? Because we are not able to secure the European border, the territory. Because indeed a lot of bad things have happened, a lot of helplessness has accompanied the actions or rather the lack of action on the part of democratic governments.

- I want to say that it is possible to deal with the problem of illegal migration and, more broadly, with problems concerning the internal security of Europe without nationalist, xenophobic slogans.

- I would like to see in this area of internal security, as well as in external security, this traditional democracy based on traditional European values - individual freedom, respect for minority rights, freedom of speech, the rule of law, public life free from corruption, politics free from the omnipotence of oligarchs, so that all those who are guided by these values also show strength and determination when it is necessary to defend our borders, our territory, our security. Democracy must become strong again. The European Union must become synonymous with strength. Ethics, morality, rights, but also strength. In politics, someone who is powerless is pathetic, is contemptible.

- Information security. It sounds mysterious, but you know what I mean. We cannot be helpless in the face of lies, in the face of disinformation. Especially now, when lies and disinformation have become a tool, a weapon in the hands of the one who attacked Ukraine and who threatens the entire European Union. Respecting freedom of speech, here we must be absolutely principled, we must find a method to prevent interference, destruction of our democracy, our elections, primarily by these Russian factories of lies and disinformation.

- Security in this sphere of information must also concern the protection of our children, our grandchildren from violence, lies, contempt for another person. This is really a subject of very deep reflection. I know what a difficult task it is - not to fall into the trap of censorship, restrictions on freedom of speech, and at the same time not to be defenseless against an aggressor who uses information as an absolute weapon, just as he uses migrants on the Polish border as an absolute weapon against European democracy.

- Security in the economy. Listen, competition, free market, these are European inventions, they also emigrated to America. But there is nothing to stop Europe from becoming the place where the economy is the most creative, the most competitive. This is also the task of the European Parliament.

- I don't want to admonish anyone here, but it seems that you are facing a great challenge, as a parliament, as a whole. It does not depend on the ideas that guide you. And it does not depend on routine, because I know, European institutions, including the parliament, in a sense the Polish presidency - we are called upon by the treaty to regulate. Our task, formally speaking, your task, is to regulate, to introduce new laws. I know how much effort and courage it will take, but I appeal to you, to your imagination. Be a parliament in this term that will make a great effort of deregulation.

- Be brave, reject routine. The Polish presidency, and I am convinced that the European institutions as well, will no longer stop at reading Draghi's reports and other warnings, but will get down to work hard. This will truly be your monument, if you are able - differently than it has been so far - to propose a major deregulation action to Europe, because our competitiveness will depend on it.

- It will also depend on energy security. Listen, you can't just talk about energy security. This energy security had several dimensions. I also had the opportunity here, in this room, to warn against the dependence, the repeated dependence of European energy on Russian supplies - for various reasons. I have no satisfaction in the fact that I was 100% right here. I would like you all to remember this lesson, regardless of your political views.

- The independence and sovereignty of Europe also directly depend on energy independence and sovereignty. Let no one think in categories such as: "the war in Ukraine will end, Russian aggression against Ukraine will end, we will return to business, as before, and we will again make Europe dependent on Russian supplies". This must end once and for all, because this dependence, among other things, led to this war. This must be clear to everyone in Europe by now.

- Energy security. Here I will say a few words, I know, unpopular, at least in some benches here. But energy security also means specific tasks that will make energy in Europe not the most expensive, but - if not the cheapest - comparable to other economic powers.

- Listen, enough of these endless reports, articles, comments, meetings, European Councils devoted to this, your debates - we simply have to honestly say that some European regulations have objectively led to the fact that the price of energy in Europe, in some European countries, is unacceptably high. How do you want to compete with the American or Chinese economy if we have energy three times more expensive?

- If today, I don't think that anyone in this room would question the need for extraordinary - because this is also a great European achievement - such European care for the natural environment and climate. Because we know what terrible consequences await the planet if we are not brave and determined here. But, here is a "but". Europe cannot lose the global competition, it cannot become a continent of naive people and ideas. If we go bankrupt, no one will care about the natural environment in the world anymore.

- I kindly ask that we honestly approach a full and very critical review of all regulations, including those resulting from the Green Deal. And that we really are able to not only indicate, but also change all those provisions that may lead to high prices, even higher energy prices.

- For example, we have the issue of ETS2 ahead of us. High energy prices could wipe out more than one democratic government in the European Union. Really realise this - also regardless of whether you are from the right, left or center - that it is not that people do not want the natural environment to be safe in Europe, but people also do not want Europe to become a place where energy is the most expensive, because this will affect them directly.

- I also ask for a deep, critical and courageous reflection on the consequences of introducing ETS2 at such a rapid pace. I strongly warn against this. And believe an experienced politician - both national and European - the political consequences - I will not say that they are unpredictable - they are terribly predictable. If we continue - so thoughtlessly - in actions that will result in even more expensive energy. We really need to get a grip on this issue.

- Food security. I think everyone understands now, recent years have shown it very clearly that for Poland, for the whole of Europe, agriculture is our treasure. Be very vigilant here too, be responsible. Europe's food security is not only - to the extent possible - Europe's self-sufficiency in terms of agricultural products. It is like this, that it is the best agriculture in the world, but it must be sustainable. Remember that.

- Here, I must say that the Commission reacted quickly, thank you very much for that. I was one of those who signalled the need for quick action, so as to remove some burdens from European farmers, from European agriculture, to change orders into incentives.

- Listen, we will effectively defend our nature if people are convinced that they want it. If Europe, the European Union, European institutions, are associated with people - and whether it is agriculture or energy - if these institutions and our actions are associated with burdens and orders, then we will lose these people as an army of those on whom the future of our environment also de facto depends.

- Let's be as common sense as possible here, this is my appeal to everyone. I know, you have your ideas. Some people even deeply believe in some such hard doctrines or ideologies, but believe me - my experience also speaks through me - for millions of Europeans the most valuable feature of a politician is not his passionate belief in some idea, but common sense, courage in thinking, rejection of routine and really common sense. This is priceless in today's times.

The seventh dimension is health security. There is no need to add anything here. The pandemic has shown very clearly, but also other diseases, for example, that people are increasingly talking about the threat to the mental health of the youngest. And this is not

only an action in the field of health, but also what I said earlier, i.e. the issue of protecting our youngest from the fatal influence in the virtual space.

- We cannot pass by this indifferently. We already know, these are scientific experiments that say what happens to the brain of a young person, what happens to the brain of a child when it is subjected, in a way that is not so completely... so massive, to this evil that is so omnipresent on the Internet at the moment.

- Let's remember this. Our future will depend - in the sense of mental condition - on those who are 5, 10 years old today. This is our greatest treasure, after all.

- My dears, I would like everyone, without exception, to believe in themselves again, and by supporting and arguing, and to rebuild this community, and to rebuild faith in this community.

- When it comes to a safe Europe, and I will end here, let's not discuss the future European army today. You know very well that if we had a European army today, the key question would be: who is at its head, in what direction would they send these European troops? My intuition tells me that if Budapest decided on this, this European army would unfortunately go in a different direction, if Warsaw decided on this.

- So let's not have any particular illusions, but let's be practical. Everyone in Europe, without exception, can probably agree that European money, European efforts together should build a safe border of the European Union, a safe external border.

- That is why I will encourage, not only because we have the Polish presidency in Europe today, to treat the Polish, Lithuanian and Finnish project of building this Eastern Shield, i.e. a border safe from aggression. And we are not only talking about hard infrastructure, but also about using the latest techniques, already tested during the Ukrainian war. Let us treat this obligation as a common one. And I think there is no party here, in this Parliament, that would question the need to defend our common border against potential aggression. I think there is no one in this chamber who would question the need to defend the European sky against a potential missile threat.

- There are many joint ventures that do not require a systemic revolution, only courage, common sense and determination. I know that some nation states are defending themselves against additional financing of European defense needs. Some are very reluctant to consider the idea of bonds and taking on debt.

- Listen, I'll be honest, we shouldn't really care too much about what method we adopt to finance pan-European, pan-European defence projects. We should finally be interested in the fact that there is no... I mean, we should finally say it out loud that there is no alternative to this. Europe must start defending itself, and so it must also start spending European money on it. This is not only this, perhaps 5% in national terms necessary in times of war,

but it is also spending incomparably more money than we have planned, as the European Union, as Europe.

- Discuss techniques in national parliaments and here. Financial techniques, please, but let no one question this need anymore. There is a very large common area that will require common financing.

- Listen, our future... and I'm finishing. Thank you for your patience, Madam Chairwoman.

- Our future will play out in our heads and in our hearts. You, dear Roberta, recalled the words of the Polish Pope. They are important to us, not just what you said about the future. And we remember in Poland the words that became the source of strength and victory of Solidarity, and therefore of Europe in a sense, during the night of communism in Poland. "Be not afraid." We heard these words and they were the source of strength. So today I would like to repeat it, quoting these words once again: "be not afraid."

- Everything will play out in your heads. Everything will play out in our hearts. The future is truly in our hands. Not in Chinese, not Russian, not American - in our hands. If you have these open...

- I give this Polish, white and red heart to all of you, because I am convinced that we will work together for a great Europe. Yes, my dears - Europe is, Europe was, and Europe will always be great. Thank you.