

## **Address by Donald Tusk, President of the European Council**

**Die Europa Rede**

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Meine Damen und Herren,

When my good friend, Hans-Gert Poettering, invited me to give this speech in February, I warned him that I would probably say something controversial. To his credit, he did not waver, and the offer still stood. As you know Hans-Gert, he is a really brave and cool guy, and that is why I hope that we will still be friends about 30 minutes from now.

To speak in Berlin on the 9th of November is always a great challenge for anyone. The history of Germany, and if of Germany, then inevitably of all Europe, is full of symbolic and meaningful dates. And yet the 9th of November is a special date: the fall of the Berlin Wall, Kristallnacht, the proclamation of the First Republic and the abdication of Wilhelm II. As you can imagine, I remember the fall of the Wall best. And not only because I was more engaged in this event than in the abdication of Wilhelm II.

When I talk about my personal engagement, I am obviously referring to the Polish Solidarnosc. Its birth in 1980 and victory in 1989 became a stimulus for the great peaceful revolution of Central

and East European nations. Equally important in my memory is the picture of thousands of refugees from the German Democratic Republic. In the late summer of 1989, they found shelter in Prague, Budapest and also in Poland on their way to the West, before the fall of the Wall. With particular satisfaction I recall the Polish univocal support for the idea of German unification. Unlike the inhabitants of the Western part of the continent, Poles saw in the united Germany a guarantee of their own freedom, independence and security, even though history didn't necessarily justify such an enthusiastic approach.

But it is not only my personal biography that makes me think of the 9th of November. Every year, you gather here in Berlin on this day to commemorate the fall of the Wall, not other historical events. This is because you have a good sense of how rich and powerful the metaphor of a torn-down wall is. And how universal and timeless it is.

Before turning to Europe, let me say a few words about this metaphor.

Firstly, the fall of the Berlin Wall proved tangibly that good can conquer evil - not only in fairy tales, distant past or papal sermons, but also in real life. It was almost like a kitschy happy ending of a long and dramatic movie about oppression in Eastern Europe. But let us not be embarrassed by this. Indeed, we all like kitschy happy

endings. The creators of the Wall knew from the start that it embodied evil, and this is why they began its construction by surprise, in secret and with a sense of unease. Only two months earlier Walter Ulbricht had reassured the public opinion that no wall dividing Germans would be raised.

Secondly, walls have dual power - that of security and that of division. The Berlin Wall didn't protect anyone. On the contrary, it divided and segregated. We know such evil walls from other places and from other times. Walls that have separated the poor from the rich, blacks from whites, Catholics from Protestants, or worst of all, the walls of the Jewish ghettos.

Thirdly, the Berlin Wall symbolised a different kind of a wall, even mightier and more dangerous, namely the one erected in human minds and hearts. Bringing it down took you thirty years. Only then, freed from it, were you able to bring down the physical wall, which the workers managed to do in four months. In November 1989, when thousands of people started going to the other side, the physical wall was still standing. But it no longer meant anything, because the people had torn it down in their minds, before bulldozers started their work. The desire for freedom and the courage of eastern Berliners invalidated the Wall's existence. I'm surprised sometimes when my German friends say that the fall of the Wall was a result of Gorbachev's generosity. This is a depressive thought. When in 1987 Ronald Reagan said, almost

exactly in the place we are today, *Mr. Gorbachev. Tear down this Wall*, the answer was silence. It was only the huge cry on the streets of Berlin and Leipzig, *People, tear down this Wall*, that set the wheels in motion. And I am not saying this to dismiss the undoubtedly positive role Gorbachev played in the peaceful collapse of the Soviet Union. I am saying this to make Germans believe in the creative potential of their dreams about freedom, not just about unification. From my point of view, and many will agree, the profound meaning of bringing the Berlin Wall down is not in the unification of Germany. It is in confirming the fact that all Europeans yearning for freedom and democracy would eventually get it.

This idea is closely connected with the history of German responsibility for Europe as a political entity, built on the principles of liberal democracy which began exactly on the 9th of November. Indeed, whether Europe survives as a continent of freedom, the rule of law, respect for an individual, and the security of its inhabitants will depend to a great extent on Germans. But of course, it will also depend on the twenty seven other nations.

Coming back to the Wall, there are those who claim that its fall did not close the German question, and that its specter is still haunting Europe. I disagree with them. Today, Germany is not a European problem. At least this aim of the Union's founding fathers has been reached: the alignment of European interests with those of its most powerful nation. By invalidating the old German question and

allowing for a strong and united German state, the fall of the Wall exposed however new problems and new challenges. They are of a European rather than specifically German nature. But whether Europe is able to meet those challenges will depend largely on Germany's attitude.

The anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall reminds us of three great challenges facing Europe.

Firstly, one of its effects was, paradoxically, the weakening of the transatlantic community, or in a broader sense, of the West. By bringing the Wall down, we brought down the traditional bipolar geopolitical order, where there was no alternative to very close cooperation between Europe and the United States. Some were perhaps too quick to assume that the collapse of the Soviet Union was also a good opportunity to escape the overpowering influence of America. The symmetric evaluation of those two superpowers and rapidly progressing European integration created an illusion. An illusion that Europe in a new multipolar world would become an equivalent, if not leading force among the global superpowers.

It is as if we forgot for a moment that politics is not only about economic statistics. And politics, as we know well, is first and foremost the ability to protect one's own territory and its system of values. Today we face a tough global confrontation involving a full range of political instruments: ideology and propaganda, money and

energy resources, cyber and military threats. It casts a shadow of doubt over the future of liberal democracy.

Let us not forget that around Europe today, we are witnessing powers which are built on values different from ours. Or failed states, where terror and anarchy are commonplace. All too often we hear opinions coming from Moscow, Beijing or Tehran which question our fundamental values. To give you an example, just a few days ago Robert Mugabe was awarded the Confucius Peace Prize.

I am not sure if Confucius would have been pleased with this choice. I am not sure either if Robert Mugabe ever thought that somebody would consider him the inheritor of Confucian reflection. But I do know what the sponsors of the prize had in mind. Briefly speaking, liberal democracy, along with its principles, is currently questioned and undermined by modern powers built on foundations different from ours. This is why our common task is to rebuild trust and cooperation in the transatlantic dimension. Whether in the case of Ukraine or Syria, global trade or migration crisis and its causes, and above all, in the case of the strategic task of protecting freedom and human rights on our continent, cooperation between Europe, the United States, and the whole Western community, should be closer than ever before.

Germany's role in this context is unique. And there can't be any room for hesitation here. Germany should be a European leader in bringing the Western community closer. Let us refrain from creating in my opinion, risky visions of new geopolitical orders such as the Eurasian Union. Surely it is not an alternative for our community founded on common values.

That Germany is capable of a positive leadership is clear in the context of the Ukrainian crisis. I have no doubt that Angela Merkel, along with the French President and the Normandy format played a key role here. Maintaining European unity vis-à-vis Russia during the conflict, which was my major objective from the start, would not have been possible without the Chancellor's personal involvement. As you know, when it concerns Ukraine, I am particularly principled, and would not allow myself to pay anybody fake compliments.

Germany as a co-guarantor of the primacy of Western values, Germany as a co-guarantor of European unity over national and corporate interests (also German ones) is a European model which, to my mind, has no good alternative. That is why the question of Nordstream is such an important test for this ambitious role. The idea of the Energy Union, which is the EU's strategy of energy security that I have been promoting for almost 2 years now, will only make sense when it is fully backed by all key European players. Especially by Germany. This is one of those simple but painful

questions that are worth being asked here in Berlin. Do we really want mercantilism to trump European strategic interests?

Secondly, the fall of the Wall was also a symbolic abolition of the borders. The Schengen agreement would virtually have no significance for half of Europe if it hadn't been for the events of 1989. Closed borders under Communism used to be one of my toughest experiences. I know the pain of being beaten by the police, what life in a prison cell looks like, what poverty means. But the feeling that I was living in a country tightly sealed from our neighbours and the whole world was especially hard to bear.

Therefore, when we are discussing the migration crisis, I always underline the significance and value of open borders inside Europe. To me, maintaining Schengen seems as important as other aspects of the refugee question. I want to state very clearly that we will not save Schengen, we will not save Europe without internal borders, unless we strengthen external European borders. Let us not fool ourselves; the fall of the Berlin Wall did not automatically abolish the need for borders as such, the borders which define the area of our European freedom.

External borders do not necessarily mean walls. It is a combination of infrastructure and complex policy that requires a wise use of soft, economic and hard power, for example against smugglers, and in order to enforce our rules and laws. It is a policy of protecting



Europe not against refugees, because they are only victims who need our help, but against those, who have caused this exodus and want to make use of it for their own interests.

If we want to rebuild Europe's ability to pursue its own migration policy, including relocation, we must control our external borders. Borders should be established in places where it is possible, where there are partners willing to cooperate. I am referring mainly to the Balkans and Turkey. But nothing will release us from the duty of taking care of our own borders. We cannot depend on third states to be available for hire to control our borders, while we keep our hands and conscience clean. This complex policy should have as its goal the stemming, or at least, a marked reduction of the migratory flow, as far as possible from Schengen borders. This requires a modification of the current paradigm in the European migration policy. In the face of the unprecedented scale of migrants flowing to Europe, we have to say in simple terms: Europe is not able to accept all the people willing to come to our continent.

Since Germany is not a border state of Europe, the responsibility lies in the first place with other countries. But even so, everybody will be looking up to you, watching out for signals coming from Berlin. I am happy to note that the protection of external borders forms part of the recent coalition agreement in your country.

Thirdly, we are talking about walls which are growing in ourselves, in our minds. The builder of those walls is fear. The great tide of refugees breeds anxiety among ordinary people, providing an opportunity for radical populists to emerge on the European political scene. Their biggest opportunity since 1945. And that is no laughing matter.

Liberal democracy is the essence of Europe. This very model is being undermined by populists and our external opponents. We must be ready to defend it. The protection of liberal democracy is our greatest task, because nothing is given forever.

We remember that here in Germany in the 1930s, the advocates of the liberal order gave up virtually without a fight. Ordinary people turned their backs on them, seeing how weak and hesitant they were. But people didn't turn away from freedom because they were fed up with it. No, they simply lost faith in the freedom camp's ability to put a stop to evil, however they understood it. They no longer believed that liberal democracy was a guarantee of security. The 9th of November, the anniversary of the Kristallnacht, also reminds us of these events. Today the risk of this scenario being repeated concerns other European countries more than Germany. Germany with its baggage of historical experience, seems to be more resilient than anybody else in Europe. But it is Germany who bears the co-responsibility for the whole of Europe, where the forces undermining the foundations of liberal democracy are growing day

by day. If we let them win, then the walls may grow again not only in the minds and hearts of the people, but also in the physical sense. The European unity may once again become a dream and not a practice of our daily-life reality

And that is why our European future will depend to a large degree on Germany's approach to the migration crisis. One thing is certain: today Germany, and personally Angela Merkel are examples of the best European tradition. Those who believe that Germany is too open, too tolerant, too liberal, forgot to do their homework about our tragic history. I am with those who think that Germany should take care of European borders bravely and without any historical complexes. This is why I am ready to say this, however controversial it may sound. Precisely because Germany is now governed by people who understand that it pays off to rate solidarity as highly as national interests. As someone for whom solidarity has been the most important experience, and in fact the essence of the whole political life, I want to say that in today's Europe it is Angela Merkel who has understood the meaning of solidarity. Solidarity as an ability to sacrifice part of one's own interest for the common good, which is Europe. Or for the good of the people in need, that is the refugees.

Now, I would like to ask all Europeans very clearly, both as President of the European Council and as a Pole: do you want a Germany that is open, tolerant, compassionate, sympathising with

the weaker and the poorer, in other words the Germany of Angela Merkel, or a Germany which is closed and ruthless? There is only one answer. And it means that Europe should show solidarity towards Germany in these difficult and testing times, also in its own, best-understood interest. Germany, on the other hand, in accordance with the role it plays in Europe, must believe that it is responsible not only for its moral message, but even more so for the whole political community of Europeans. It means taking responsibility for the challenges I have spoken about, symbolized by the date of the fall of the Wall. Namely, for the strengthening of the political community of the West, securing European external borders, and for protecting Europe against radical populisms. Which means in a sentence, for providing a strong leadership in the camp of freedom.

Henry Kissinger once said: *Germany is too big for Europe and too small for the world.* Now it is time for you to believe that you are just right.

Vielen dank.