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“Europe’s Elective Affinities”

*Europa Union Deutschland: 70th anniversary celebration
11th January 2017, Berlin*

I come from Poland. Many books have already been written, many wait to be written about relations between Poland and Germany. But we must never forget that due to geography and history we are natural partners,. This leads to common interests. The most important among those common, shared interests is the European Union. I am convinced that European integration has been a conducive framework for our mutual understanding and friendship.

The integration of our continent is often seen as a miracle of history. Chancellor Merkel said it in 2011, in Gdansk. This is however a strange miracle. It didn’t happen by itself. Many of us worked hard to make it happen. This miracle today does not seem to be appreciated by many. Also relations between our two countries sometimes seem to be more about memory, and less about the future. Variable winds and bad storms come and go. We must be prepared that they can always return. That is why we must be together in taking care of Europe and of the community of values we share.

In difficult times like those we live now, it is good to stop for a while and look back to see how much we have achieved throughout a long history of European integration. In March, we will reflect on the European integration, this miracle made by women and men of Europe, celebrating in Rome the 60th anniversary of signing the founding Treaties. Today we are here to celebrate the 70th anniversary of your Movement. Without Movements like yours, Treaty of Rome would not have happen.

You have been the pioneers of the idea of peace, prosperity and security through integration in Europe. While calling for Europe without borders you have given us, Poles, hope in the dark times, when we were isolated from the integrating Europe, remaining for decades on the other side of the river.

For 70 years, you have been a relentless campaigner for and a defender of European unity. By being courageous and open but also constructively critical, you have been a source of inspiration and an essential force in rallying politicians, opinion leaders, civil society and citizens around every important milestone of Europe’s integration.

Unfortunately, today nothing what we have achieved can be taken for granted.

Denis de Rougemont, Swiss federalist said many years ago: “The point is not to foresee the future, but to create it”. Indeed, Europe of tomorrow will not just happen, it will have to be created.. It is up to all of us who care for Europe to spare no efforts to make Europe a working democracy. We have a solid base to build Europe anew.

We must reach out to citizens. We must listen to their concerns but also to their dreams. Europe is by the citizens and for the citizens.

I recall the name of Denis de Rougemont not accidentally. He was the man with the ability to take a long breath when speaking about Europe. De Rougemont said that "Europe is much older than the European nations. Their lack of unity and their ever more illusory claims to absolute sovereignty endanger its very existence. If only they could unite, Europe would be saved, and with it all that remains valuable in its richly creative diversity". These words were valid then and they are valid today.

De Rougemont's second passion, after Europe, was the idea of love. You must love what you build. For many of us, in our big or small nation-states, Europe is, a marriage of convenience, at best a mind set but there is no emotion. Love is lacking. Perhaps this is why we find it so difficult to present a convincing case for deeper integration, where many and diverse countries come together and achieve common goals while preserving diversity.

In one way Europe 'unconsciously' already 'is', but in the other way it is still dormant, waiting to be appropriated as a political project – consciously adopted as a part of our own present identity and transformed into a livable, political project. Only this kind of "rediscovering" Europe anew will enable us to confront the populist movements that are, in their deep mythology, based on false identitarian claims, nationalist impulses and racism.

2016 has shaken us profoundly, confirming that these are times of disasters and disruptions, of insufficient tolerance of our differences, of a collapse of many treasured ideas, of new disgraceful ways of doing politics, of growing usefulness of lying in politics. Of citizens getting angry. Of helplessness. It does not make much sense to argue whether the year that has just ended was or was not the worst year ever. It is gone now but it has left us with many bad legacies to cope with.

But having said that, we must not agree with those who claim that the best times of European integration are behind us. Also, we must be very careful when listening to those who say: let us make Europe great again. We need both, pragmatism and vision in our thinking and acting, and getting people involved. Without a vision it is impossible to wake up people's enthusiasm for change, to wake up positive emotions.

Europe cannot afford the disengagement of any of its member states. It can move forward only if critical mass of partnership has been reached. With U.K. leaving, all hands of the 27 are needed on board. Political cohesion must come back urgently. All elections of 2017 must be won. Fragmentations must be addressed. Union must hold together, even if populism will continue for a while making cooperation and unity hard to sell to the citizens. It requires courage and commitment from national leaders. Do we have it? I wish I could say we do.

It is a fact of life that challenges we face as Europeans increasingly require European solutions. No Member State alone can deal with what is at stake in a globalised, interconnected and ever more dangerous world. So, why do we see such

an increased focus on national sovereignty and the wish of taking the control back to national capitals?

One can wonder, why so many opinion makers question the European public good? Why do national political leaders come to meetings of European institutions with a purely national agenda, and reject European solutions to problems and on their way back home criticize Europe for inaction. The often-heard statement that the Union "does not deliver" comes mostly from those who spare no effort to prevent Europe from delivering. Others question the Union competences or the way it functions. Why is it that we seem to forget that the European Union is a structured way of cooperating and that the "rules of the game", the aims and methods in which this cooperation takes place have been agreed upon by all Member States, voted by all national parliaments in accordance with each Member States own constitutional requirements?

European integration is not cast in stone, it is a living and a long-term project. And it is true that we somehow missed the moment where the initial legitimization narrative shaped at the time Europe was emerging from the war ashes with a vision based on forging lasting friendship and solidarity became more or less irrelevant to younger generations and, unfortunately, also to new generations of European leaders. That weakening of legitimacy allowed the return of virulent nationalisms out of the margins into the mainstream of the European discourse. Nationalisms never worked for Europe.

We continue talking about democratic deficit in Europe. But this is no longer the problem of the "democratic deficit". This is something much more serious that can threaten the survival of European values, not only the institutions. Some of us continue to think that the European Union has such a strong construction that we may tinker with it here and there and it will still stand unmoved. It is not the case. The stability of the EU construction depends not only on formal laws, treaties, regulation, intergovernmental relations, but most intimately, on the commitment of people to the values that inspired the founding generations. And today this commitment cannot be taken for granted.

As a European citizen I have my worries and fears when I look to the years ahead, to 2017. I fear nothing can be taken for granted. There will be politicians in the Union, who will question European decision-making processes. We will hear voices calling for reducing powers of the Commission and returning powers to the Member States. One Member State will be negotiating to leave the Union and "take the control back". The respect of the rule of law might continue to be questioned by some governments. Rulings by the European Court of Human Rights will be considered by some as intrusions in national political choices. Many human beings will continue to find themselves in absolutely devastating circumstances fleeing wars, poverty, and other disasters, and look for a better destiny. And we as Europeans will not want them.

We should continuously seek improvements in the functioning of our democracies, at national and European level with a view of increasing our capacity to act, improving legitimacy and democratic accountability. But we should ensure that we also

continue to respect fundamental rights, dignity of individuals, freedoms and the rule of law.

For years, by virtue of their content, the meaning of the Treaties has been stretched to address emerging problems. This has added to the problem of democratic legitimacy and hampered the functioning of the European institutions. It has also raised uncertainties about the legal bases underpinning our institutional democratic structures, and their capacity to act. The obvious solution - Treaty change - is a politically difficult issue to address and for which there seems to be no clear political will. We also all know that many needed reforms can be implemented within the existing treaty framework. And we must use this potential. But our duty is to at least look seriously into those areas where without treaty change European capacity to respond to people's fears, needs and ambitious will remain limited.

The current treaties do not provide sufficient space for a more participatory process, do not give assurances to citizens with regard to their impact on decisions by giving them guarantee of being listened to, and do not provide sufficient access for individuals and civil society representatives to the decision making process. From this perspective they are obsolete. We need a decision making system that would be convincing and credible alternative to the referendum mechanism.

If we, as the European Union, do not address those problems now, it is very likely that we will see more intergovernmental treaties or new draft treaties inspired by cultural revolution already announced taking European integration back to its initial stages, turning back the integration clock. There are political leaders for whom the integration past seems to have more appeal than the future.

But Union is not only the Union of states. It is the Union of citizens. Since its very inception and throughout its history the European Union has had the citizens at its core. The continuation of the European project as a stable, credible and loved Union depends, more than ever on the commitment of the citizens to the values and principles that have justified its own foundation. Our duty as those in charge is thus to commit to the people, to be with the people in this effort to bring their commitment to Europe back. Citizens have never been so aware, so knowledgeable as they are nowadays. So we must act accordingly. We must also understand better the risk that citizens can be influenced by all kinds of populist debates, which very often instil fear and distrust. The campaign that preceded the British referendum is a glaring proof of exactly this. Citizens are worried about their rights as workers, about their security, about the environment, about the impact of globalisation, about energy supply security, and also about the enormous uncertainty that surrounds the economic and financial systems. These are challenges, the whole extension of which cannot be tackled by any Member State on its own. And, people want to participate in European decision making. We see it in the frequency of ECJ.

Safeguarding and improving democracy is a daily task not only of professional politicians. Also, as citizens we must continuously strive to improve the way our democracy and Europe functions for the benefit of the future generations.

Of course European citizens are very different today than 60 or even 10 years ago. They form part of the global world and that is why to understand challenges that

Europe faces, one must reach out beyond Europe to more universal processes of the change. Not to justify our helplessness, but to understand and explore the nature and depth of change. We see regressive and illiberal forces not only in Europe, but this is not a consolation. Political fragility of the current form of globalization works against us. We see the lack of democratic accountability of the whole process of globalization due to lack of adequate global institutions that would regulate global markets, legitimize them and stabilize them. Nobody can profit from the uncertainty and instability around. But sustainable global change can only happen through cooperation among partners, cooperation which does not lead to an uneven distribution of gains. So Europe's choice is to make the future global world the world of fair cooperation. Nationalism cannot deliver on wellbeing, security or fairness.

We must win once again public support for globalization. This is not only about development and well being. This is also about security. Without functioning, organised globalization the world will be more dangerous.

Western liberal world will have to continue its fight for democracy, for free trade, for open societies. These values are under threat. If they are lost, we are lost.

We have lost a substantial part of European confidence capital and even more of what I would call solidarity capital, two fundamentals of European integration. They are both difficult to restore but it is not an impossible task.

People do have legitimate concerns, fears and expectations. They do not care about what politicians argue about which is "more Europe or less Europe". They want their concerns being taken seriously and effectively addressed. And they do see that many fundamental solutions can come only from Europe, and security is a good example here. And there are and will be more and more not less and less problems that require European solutions. So yes, Europe's capacity to deliver is and will be crucial. Europe needs to deliver what citizens are expecting from us, and we need to involve citizens in a dialogue on Europe. Europe needs to be talked about to become a desired and loved element of our life.

In the times when security is our top and common concern, credibility of Europe will be build on common security policy. On unity in relations with Russia. On capacity to take jointly decisive actions in the foreign policy. Europe will need to be clear on its interests and preferences in its new relationship with the United States. But credibility of Europe depends also on the capability to handle eurozone fiscal challenges, to generate growth, jobs, competitiveness. And, it gets without saying, that in all that people expect a fair Europe.

Let me conclude by expressing a strong conviction that there are democratic pro-European forces in Europe. We have in the Union cohorts of young people in all sorts of European movements. They should be encouraged to leave their ivory towers, Erasmus students should talk to other Erasmus students, committed academics should get outside campuses, European institutions should cooperate on communication. Famous blame game cases should be discredited each time they occur in the public space. The policy of saying the truth, the policy based on "facts do matter" principle should become again the norm.

A committed and active federalist organisation is today more needed than ever, to spur national governments and politicians to act, to counter the negative forces of nationalism and populism, and to rally citizens and politicians around a positive vision of the European project.

And my last word is about Johan Wolfgang Goethe. I must admit, I discovered quite late that he was not only a poet. He wrote a novel. Its title is "Elective Affinities". Europe is an "elective affinity". You cannot become a European against your wish. But you have to choose it not only with your passport but also with your heart. And when I look at you, at what you have been doing so far, I think you have been doing exactly this - choosing Europe with your heart. Thank you for this.