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Let's keep the unity, while pushing forward

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Dear friends,

I very much regret that I cannot be with you. But I would like to share with you some thoughts this way.

Europe has been for a while in the mood of reflecting on its future.

You note it in the conference program.

You mention the multispeed integration with a question mark. Actually, I think that multispeed Europe is a fact of life.

It is already here with us. And it is to stay.

The often forgotten fact is, that the European Treaties have always had some space for flexibility to accommodate often different preferences of member states.

One can say, that the Treaties themselves have contributed to the differentiation in integration.

Nine EU member states are outside the eurozone. Ireland does not belong to Schengen. Denmark is outside of Europe's Common Security and Defense policy. Poland, I am unhappy to say, opted out of the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Differentiation can be temporal and this is when one generally uses the term multispeed. Differentiation can also be sectoral or territorial.

There are many examples of opt-outs in the integration:

In the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice : the UK and Ireland have flexible opt-out and opt-in arrangement for legislation, while Denmark has a more rigid opt-out.

In the single currency area: all EU Member States are legally committed to join euro, except the UK and Denmark. They have a permanent opt-out. Sweden has a de facto opt-out.

In the context of the economic and financial crisis, Eurozone members have often resorted to intergovernmental agreements, such as the Treaty on Stability, Cooperation and Governance known as 'Fiscal Compact'. It was signed by all EU Member States except for the UK and the Czech Republic. And it was a result of British veto that made it impossible to keep it within the Treaty framework. Then there is also intergovernmental cooperation in the field of research, technological development and space: the European Organisation for Nuclear Research where we have 18 EU members, or the European Space Agency with 20 EU members.

Another example is Schengen acquis: UK, Ireland and Denmark are excluded, while Bulgaria, Romania, Cyprus and Croatia are waiting to join.

In the area of Common Security and Defence Policy: Denmark is not participating in measures with defence implications. We have there the notion of "constructive abstention" as a possibility for some Member States to choose a slower path of integration in this field without limiting the willingness of the others.

The Treaty, I think here of Article 20 of the Treaty on European Union also allows for enhanced cooperation on divorce law. Here we have already 17 Member States participating. On the EU patent with unitary effect - 26 Member States participating.

On European Public Prosecutor's Office - 17 Member States, Property Regime Rules of International Couples - 17 Member States and the Financial Transaction Tax - 10 Member States participating.

A specific form of enhanced cooperation in the area of defence is the Permanent Structured Cooperation under Article 46 Treaty on European Union - PESCO. It was launched for the first time in November 2017 with 25 Member States. The aim is to jointly develop defence capabilities and make them available for EU military operations. The specific feature of PESCO is the binding nature of the commitments undertaken by participating Member States. However, participation remains voluntary and decision-making will remain in the hands of participating Member States.

Many of us believe differentiated integration can be better exploited, not as a convenient means to opt out, but as a possibility for those who have a greater drive for deepening integration. They can go deeper and faster.

As the history shows, moving forward selectively can be done within the treaties or outside the treaties. I trust the treaties and believe we should offer ourselves a better legal framework for the two speed Europe based on the common currency.

Without doubt Eurozone will move into deeper integration in the years to come. It will be at the same time a uniting factor for those in the area, while permitting the other Member States to join as soon as they can.

Differentiated integration should stay within the Treaty framework.

Treaties are the backbone of the EU. Treaties are also important in generating the trust of the citizens that their expectations can be met as a matter of EU's obligations, and not as a good will of some national leaders.

We have to be aware that the acceptance for multispeed future of our common house which is Europe is not a matter of happy choice for the EU. We do not encourage slicing Europe in halves or fourths, or even smaller parts. But we have to accept facts at their face value and go from what is there. The European integration has always moved forward in series of responses to already existing demands. Now, the obvious demand in the face of globalization and also Brexit is to make Europe stronger and more united at its core. It is about "Europe that delivers", as it was formulated recently by President Jean-Claude Juncker.

Europe has to deliver many things: more durable basis for legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens, preparedness for global competition, credible foreign policy, defense infrastructure.

There will always be groups of those who want to be in the avangarde and those who want to go slower. The EU has always been about willing cooperation, not a forced one. But at the same time, we cannot allow for watering down of the Union.

And herein lies the dilemma: for while going at a faster pace we have to install also safeguards for those who, for the time being, would not be able to meet this faster pace. Always of course with the hope, that in time they will join.

Keeping the unity, while pushing forward, will be key for ensuring the integrity of the internal market, consistency of policies and non- discrimination between the euro area and the entire union.

It would require a high degree of political determination, but also of sensitivity, on the part of the European Commission. It will also demand an increased role for the European Parliament as the best vehicle for expressing the will of the European people and for scrutinizing the policy proposals in the spirit of “sensitive multispeed integration”. It would have to take into consideration various concerns of those who are wary of formalistic, top-down integration.

This is a tall order. But I trust we will find enough political will for consent to work out proper mechanisms to make it a success for all.

Thank you for your kind attention.