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“Europe of tomorrow will not just happen. It will have to be created”

Opening Ceremony of the International Youth Conference

“The Future is Europe”

European Youth Parliament EYP Poland

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Dear Friends,

I am very happy to welcome you all!

You have chosen as the slogan of this wonderful meeting of the European Youth Parliament „The Future is Europe“.

And it is my great conviction that this will also become a password to your future: as individuals and as a community of people with passion for Europe in its many dimensions. And also, a password for all of you who fight for climate, who want to fully benefit from what the digital transformation promises, all of you who want to benefit from all freedoms that the European Union offers and want to engage together for making Europe a continent livable and lovable for coming generations.

I hope it is your ambition to make Europe a fascinating place, full of creativity, a place that is attractive with its freedom of expression and open culture.

Denis de Rougemont, an unfortunately somehow forgotten Swiss writer, said 100 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 and you must get involved in this process of creation. And also, it is up to you and me, to all of us who care for Europe to spare no efforts to make Europe a pole of attraction for the global world. I hope you agree with me that you must love what you build.

And if you engage in shaping the future of Europe, you will develop a feeling that I can tell you from my own experience is a very good feeling - the feeling of ownership of Europe.

For some, in our big or small nation-states, Europe is a marriage of convenience, at best a mindset but no emotion. Love is lacking.

Perhaps this is why we find it sometimes difficult to present a convincing case for deeper integration, where many and diverse countries and communities of European citizens come together and achieve common goals while preserving diversity.

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We emerge from the terrible time of the pandemic. What we all need is hope.

We have to make our societies and economies more resilient. We need to keep our democracy intact. We have to grow new competences for the Union so that no crisis like this will hit us again with such a deadly force.

I do not know if you have noticed how much we all have relied on Europe in the last year and a half. We could realize once again how small Europe is and how much our security and safety depended on others.

And as you know we have also among ourselves, in the European Union, political leaders that bend democracy and European unity to their political interests. We cannot allow those who do not care about Europe and democracy to take advantage of this difficult moment and undermine our unity and cohesion.

Europe as a whole is a fragile idea, if not supported by its citizens it can become defenseless against those who want to destroy humanity in the world.

And that is why we also need to provide a beautiful narrative about Europe, as humanity's bulwark.

Political and institutional solutions are important, but they are cold and often depersonalized. We should thus be open to involve artists, writers, creative people, who can augment our message by different type of discourse than just a cerebral one. We need to engage people's emotions. Europe that would be an object of love could become what Olga Tokarczuk, Polish Nobel laureate, called „a tender narrator" of our common future on this small continent, and, who knows, perhaps a global one as well.

Real changes, that are needed in the EU, will come when the Europeans are ready to accept them. Not just as legislative proposals, but as something that touches our individual lives at a deepest level.

Above the values, enshrined in the treaty, there are also values that we have developed within the Union during its existence.

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I think here of trust between partners, truthfulness, cooperative attitude, openness, also a certain „geopolitical empathy“, the ability to look at Europe as a small point on the global map that should be supported and protected as a whole, and not torn apart by falsely understood national interests.

If all these values stop to exist, if they are broken, not taken seriously, or mocked by a significant part of the political elite, it will mean a deep crisis for European citizens.

Europe cannot be just taken for granted. Together we must protect what we have achieved so far, bringing this historically divided continent together.

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

But we should also ensure that we continue to respect fundamental rights, dignity of individuals, freedoms and the rule of law. For this we can see that the key are not politicians – the key are citizens.

According to the Lisbon Treaty, Union is not only the Union of states. It is the community of citizens!

Actually, since its inception Europe has been both for citizens and by citizens.

Of course, European citizens are very different today than they were 60 or even 10 years ago.

We also 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. And to ensure that Europe is prepared to take its part of responsibility for the world. Do not forget about that.

We must also understand better the risk that citizens can be influenced by all kinds of populist debates, which very often instill fear and distrust.

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. Politicians, institutions and citizens, we all should be together in this effort to solidify our commitment to Europe.

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Every home needs an improvement from time to time.

Now the time has come to make Europe not only more effective in action but also a more comfortable and welcoming place to all of us.

We have already started our debate about Europe of tomorrow within the framework of the unprecedented public dialogue to which all of you can bring an incredibly important added value.

All of you who want to bring your own view on how the new design for our home could look like, should join the Conference on the future of Europe to share your ideas and dreams. Only if there are many of us the Conference has a chance to be a success. Europe is waiting for your loud voice, coming from all corners of the Union.

In particular the voice of young people must be heard. We have in the Union cohorts of young people in all sorts of European movements, like yours.

You form part of a committed and active, multifaceted pro-European civic movement that 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.

I would encourage you to leave your spheres of comfort, to talk to those who are not yet convinced, perhaps more passive, disengaged.

You cannot become a European against your wish. But you have to choose it not only with your passport but also with your heart.