

Address by President Donald Tusk to the 73rd United Nations General Assembly

The European Union is fighting intensely to preserve the rules-based international order, which is currently under great strain, in terms of trade, security, climate change or human rights. We say this not only as countries strongly supporting the United Nations, but as a continent that cares deeply about respect, mutual understanding and solidarity between nations.

As leaders, we must equip the United Nations with the means to fulfil its mandate successfully. More unity and collective action are needed in the struggle against conflict, poverty and famine, terrorism and mass displacement of people, of the kind we see in Venezuela, Syria, Myanmar and many other places.

To that end, the European Union firmly supports the current effort to reform the UN. These reforms are badly needed and overdue. The urgency is clear and implementation is essential.

The European Union is taking on more responsibility for security matters. We have initiated ambitious co-operation among our own militaries. We are ready to step-up help to our neighbours through crisis management missions, capacity building and peacekeeping, in cooperation with others, including NATO, the African Union and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The Union also supports the Action for Peacekeeping initiative and expects it to produce more effective and better resourced global security solutions.

Europe has undertaken action against the increased use of disinformation and outside propaganda in open democratic elections. The anonymity of cyberspace is used by external actors to cloak malicious political interference. It is not just Europe's problem; many others here today are similarly affected. The United Nations should help expose this phenomenon, attribute responsibility and increase democratic resilience.

One hundred years since Nelson Mandela's birth, we remember his triumph over apartheid in South Africa. I am very pleased that this occasion has also coincided with deeper ties between the African and European Unions. The summit of our both Unions in Abidjan last November was key. Thanks to the excellent cooperation between the African Union, the European Union and the United Nations we have until today helped over 30.000 people to leave Libya through voluntary humanitarian returns. We want to expand the work with our partners in other areas. Therefore, education, investment in development, climate change and free trade will be at the heart of our future relations. Africa is a continent of great challenges but it is also a continent of equally great opportunities.

Instability in Libya has brought the world's attention to the suffering caused by human smugglers and traffickers who take brutal advantage of people and weaken the states in which they operate. The Security Council named some of worst violators last June. They and those like them, should be sanctioned, apprehended and brought to justice. In the meantime, the European Union will work diligently and in good faith with our North African partners on search and rescue efforts in the Mediterranean. Only collective responsibility can offer effective solutions to global phenomena such as migration and forced displacement. And I truly hope that the recent UN debates on the future governance of migration and refugee protection represent a step in the right direction.

The European Union leads global resettlement efforts, including through resettlement from Turkey, which is hosting refugees displaced by the fighting in Syria, as are Jordan and Lebanon. The Syrian people are suffering as the war continues. The memorandum of understanding on Idlib needs to be fully implemented to help avoid a humanitarian catastrophe. All parties must respect international humanitarian law, ensure the protection of civilians, and allow aid to reach those in need. A meaningful political process under the United Nations auspices is especially needed to bring about a resolution to the conflict.

Sustainable development and increasing continent-to-continent connectivity will bring countries, people and societies closer together. These priorities will be crucial in our future relations with Africa and also at the next month's Asia-Europe Meeting, which I will be hosting in Brussels. They go hand in hand with the implementation of the Paris Agreement on climate change, and with other international commitments.

From floods to fires, the impact of climate change becomes more visible every year, and sadly, we are now measuring the impact in loss of human life. And still, even though only slow progress is being made on our main task, namely to implement the Paris Agreement, the European Union remains fully committed to it and makes it a priority in its relations with our partners.

And when we talk about the environment, let me use this occasion to appeal to all the leaders to undertake action to protect the waters around the Antarctic. There is still time to save the natural habitat of many endangered species by establishing maritime sanctuaries in the Southern Ocean. Let me say it loud and clear: those who can imagine our planet without whales, penguins and other species will also have to imagine our planet without humans.

Non-proliferation is another global challenge we face but here, things are looking up thanks to multilateral action on sanctions. On the Korean peninsula, a year ago the situation was critical. Although much depends on the attitude of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), we have seen that diplomacy can open the way to more comprehensive solutions. A similar situation exists with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran. While addressing nuclear issues, the deal has also helped to create space for dialogue on other concerns, like Iran's regional behaviour and ballistic missile programmes. The agreement is good for European, regional and global security. That is why the European Union is committed to maintaining the agreement, as long as Iran remains fully committed to it.

A while ago, I mentioned the one hundredth birthday anniversary of Nelson Mandela. In the coming hours, the seventy fifth birthday anniversary will be celebrated by another Nobel peace prize winner, a great Pole, Lech Wałęsa. They are both symbols of a beautiful cause: how to win without violence, how to forgive our oppressors, and how in public life, to overcome evil with good. Today, when so many people, also here in this hall, including even the most powerful world leaders, are starting to give up on freedom, solidarity and democracy, let us remember Mandela's and Wałęsa's message. And that, regardless of how difficult their situation was, they never capitulated in their fight. Thank you.

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