

## **Address by President Donald Tusk to the European Parliament on the informal meeting of heads of state or government of 23 September 2015**

The real test for any community comes in a time of crisis. Just like we check our banks using stress tests, today life itself is using a dramatic migration stress test to check our community. And that is what the last European Council was about. You know its results. Allow me then to share a more general thought with you - especially that in ten days the next European Council will be dealing with the same problem.

Historical changes and threats on a large scale demand a sense of dignity and self-belief from every community, particularly now, when the whole world is focusing its attention on Europe and on its reaction to the wave of refugees. Europe is subject to an increasingly more scathing criticism, and our internal disagreements and mutual recriminations only help our opponents. Almost everyone in Europe has joined the choir of critics, while very few defend its good name. In the United Nations, one could have an impression that Europe is the worst place in the world for refugees. Believe me, I felt isolated there when I defended Europe's good reputation, trying to convince the audience that the truth about Europe is completely different.

Hundreds of thousands of refugees go to Europe because they know that our community is still the most open and tolerant of all. It is still us who respect international standards and conventions, and, it is Europe where people, all people, are safer than anywhere else. Let us not let Europe become a scapegoat due our quarrelling and blaming each other with no restraint. Otherwise, before long, theocracies will start to lecture us what religious tolerance means, dictators will tell us what democracy means, and those who are responsible for this massive exodus, will tell us how to treat refugees. In fact, they are already doing this. There are countries, which virtually do not admit any refugees, but are most vocal when it comes to urging Europe to show more openness. That is why we have to take care of our good name, together.

We keep talking about solidarity. About quotas and greater assistance for refugees on our soil, and for those who remain in camps and countries outside the EU. Let's remember, however, that solidarity requires mutual understanding and respect. Without solidarity among Member States, we will not be able to help others. It is our common obligation to assist refugees as well as to protect the EU's external borders. Everyone must take up this obligation and at the same time no-one should be left alone with the burden. That is how I understand solidarity.

We have to respect commonly agreed rules. When someone says that they have no intention of observing European law, for example Dublin or quotas, they undermine the essence of solidarity and our community. Observing rules will always mean sacrificing part of our interests. I would like to dedicate these words to the Hungarians and the Italians, to the Slovaks and the Greeks.

Let us have no illusions. Today, we have to count mainly on ourselves. The world around us does not intend to help Europe. Many of our neighbours have much bigger problems to tackle, and some look with satisfaction at our troubles. For us, refugees are specific people, individuals, who expect our help. There are forces around us however, for whom the wave of refugees is just dirty business or a political bargaining chip. We are slowly becoming witnesses to the birth of a new form of political pressure, and some even call it a kind of a new hybrid war, in which migratory waves have become a tool, a weapon against neighbours. This requires particular sensitivity and responsibility on our side.

You all know the notion of ethics of responsibility from the works of Weber, not Manfred but Max. Today, the ethics of responsibility requires us to refrain from extremes. And by extremes I mean both anti-immigration rhetoric on one hand, and on the other, inviting everyone willing to come, despite being unable to take them under our roof. We finally have to understand it - today millions of potential refugees and migrants are dreaming about Europe - not only from Syria, but also from Africa, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and other places. For all refugees, easy access to Europe and lack of external borders have become, besides the "Willkommenspolitik," a magnet attracting them to us.

During my visits to the region, whoever I spoke to, Presidents or refugees in the camps, in Turkey, Jordan, or Egypt, warned me

against one thing: a potential victory of Assad's regime, is more likely today because of Iran and Russia's engagement in Syria, and will result in the next migratory wave. Yesterday, this message was confirmed by President Erdoğan. According to Turkish estimates, another three million potential refugees may come from Aleppo and its neighbourhood.

Declaring solidarity is always greeted with applause, while calling for responsibility and common sense - hardly ever. Practising solidarity is a lot harder than preaching it. I am speaking as a decades-long practitioner.

This is why I ask you all to show responsibility and common sense. The first commandment today is the restoration of control on the EU's external borders as a *conditio sine qua non* of an effective, humanitarian and safe migratory policy. Tomorrow, in the European Parliament you will hear Angela Merkel and François Hollande. We all know how much depends on them. In this crisis situation they have both demonstrated beautiful moral gestures, which we all highly appreciate. Tomorrow, they must pass an even harder exam: an exam in responsibility for the protection of the European political community and its external borders. Otherwise, they, and all of us will become responsible for the re-emergence of walls and barriers on our internal borders, here in Europe. We have to finally say it loud and clear: Europe without its external borders equals Europe without Schengen. Europe without its external borders will become a breeding ground for fear in each and every one of us. And this will lead us, sooner than later, to a political catastrophe.

What ordinary people expect from politicians first and foremost is effectiveness and determination. If the leaders of mainstream politics do not realize this, people will start to look for different kinds of leadership, radical and ruthless. Because what people want from their leaders above all is a guarantee of order and security for their own community. Either we will face up to that challenge, or others will take our place. The queue of political machos is quite long. But there is still time to stop them. And that depends entirely on us. Thank you.

**Press office - General Secretariat of the Council**

Rue de la Loi 175 - B-1048 BRUSSELS - Tel.: +32 (0)2 281 6319

[press@consilium.europa.eu](mailto:press@consilium.europa.eu) - [www.consilium.europa.eu/press](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/press)