

Remarks by President Donald Tusk after his meeting with Vice President of the United States Mike Pence

Let me, first of all, thank you for this meeting. We all truly needed it. Too much has happened over the past months in your country, and in the EU; too many new, and sometimes surprising opinions have been voiced over this time about our relations - and our common security - for us to pretend that everything is as it used to be. And thank you for being so open and frank with me.

Today I heard words which are promising for the future, words which explain a lot about the approach of the new administration in Washington. I repaid our guest by offering honesty in my assessment of the situation; I shared our concerns and hopes. Given that I am an incurably pro-American European who is fanatically devoted to transatlantic cooperation, I could afford to be outspoken even more.

I asked the Vice President directly if he shared my opinions on three key matters: the international order, security and the attitude of the new American administration towards the European Union. Firstly, I expressed my belief that maintaining order based on the rules of international law, where brute force and egoism do not determine everything, lies in the interest of the West. And, that maintaining that order can only be enforced through a common, mutually supportive and decisive policy of the whole of the Western community. For millions of people around the world, the predictability and stability of our approach provide a guarantee or - at the very least - hope that chaos, violence and arrogance will not triumph in a global dimension. Referring to some statements made in Munich just two days ago, I would like to say clearly that the reports of the death of the West have been greatly exaggerated. Whoever wants to demolish that order, anticipating a post-West order, must know that in its defence we will remain determined.

Secondly, our security is based on NATO and the closest possible transatlantic cooperation. We must work together to modernise the forms of this cooperation. Some of them should indeed be improved. But we should also, I believe, agree on one thing: the idea of NATO is not obsolete, just like the values which lay at its foundation are not obsolete. Let us discuss everything, starting with financial commitments - but only to strengthen our solidarity, never to weaken it.

Thirdly, we are counting, as always in the past, on the United States' wholehearted and unequivocal, let me repeat, unequivocal support for the idea of a united Europe. The world would be a decidedly worse place if Europe were not united. Americans know best what great value it is to be united, and that becoming divided is the prelude to a fall. It is in the interest of us all to prevent the disintegration of the West. And, as for our continent, in this respect we will not invent anything better than the European Union.

In reply to these three matters, I heard today from Vice President Pence three times "yes"! After such a positive declaration, both Europeans and Americans must simply practise what they preach.

On Saturday in Munich, you mentioned that during your trip across Europe in 1977 with your older brother, you found yourselves at some point in West Berlin, marvelling at what you saw, then crossing through Checkpoint Charlie only to see the "shadow of repression hanging over people". As you know, I had been living under this shadow for over thirty years. What I vividly remember from my own past is how after Martial Law was imposed in Poland on 13 December 1981, President Ronald Reagan urged all Americans to light a "solidarity candle" on Christmas Eve, as he did himself. It is not difficult to imagine how this moving message of American solidarity with the oppressed Polish nation against, as Reagan said, "the forces of tyranny and those who incite them from without", helped bring back hope and the determination not to give in.

In your speech you also highlighted the historic role of some American and European leaders, including Vaclav Havel and Lech Wałęsa. I was lucky to cooperate closely with the two of them in difficult times. Similarly to us, they all believed in the purpose of cooperation and solidarity between Europe and the US. We cannot let their efforts go to waste. After today's talks it will be easier for me to believe that we will fulfil this task.