



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL
THE PRESIDENT**



Munich, 1 February 2014
EUCO 32/14

PRESSE 46
PR PCE 25

**Opening speech by President of the European Council
Herman Van Rompuy
at the Munich Security Conference**

As we meet here today, people across the world – not least in nearby Ukraine – are voicing their aspirations for universal values we in Europe and America cherish.

The last time I spoke here was three years ago, as Tahir square in Cairo was sizzling, just days before the Mubarak regime fell. Since, what twists and turns in the Arab world, how many predictions proven wrong! The initial springtime optimism has petered out. And yet, once unleashed, the thirst for democracy will not go away.

And yet, next week, in Tunisia, where it all began, a new democratic constitution will be celebrated – securing equal rights for men and women, regardless of religion or belief. Honouring President's Marzouki's long quest, I'll speak for Europe next Friday in Tunis at that ceremony. It is not every day that we can celebrate the successful transition to a new beginning.

Why this example? Because sometimes in the heat of events, in the stream of declarations and tweets, we lose sight of the time factor. We frantically look at hours and days, forgetting the years and decades. We lose sight of slow evolutions, of subtle trends. Subtler than the "*decline of the West*" or the "*rise of the Rest*".

Never was a democracy born overnight. We all paid a price to live free. In the European Union, with many of our countries returned only relatively recently to the harbour of democracy, we know all about it.

P R E S S

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The Middle East will never be the same again. Cards are being re-dealt. Globally, and also in the region around us. In the midst of all these shifts, Europe is finding its role and place.

Of course today Ukraine is on all our minds. As people across the country are taking to the streets, Ukraine's political destiny is still in the balance. In Brussels earlier this week, the President of the European Commission and I had a frank exchange with President Putin. We answered his concerns about the impact on Russia of closer economic ties between Ukraine and Europe. We also pressed the point of the rights of independent countries; the same goes for Moldova and Georgia.

Some people think Europeans are naïve; that we prefer carrots over sticks. Now, I am not saying that we cannot sometimes play our hand more strongly. But surely it is a bad idea to let foul play undercut the very values that constitute our power of attraction in the first place – a power of attraction that brought down the Berlin Wall. Our biggest carrot is a way of life; our biggest stick: a closed door.

Whatever the geopolitics; we have offered Ukraine a closer association with the European Union, the countries to its west. Not for free, but upon conditions – which were close to fulfilled. And not against the great neighbouring nation to its east, with which it shares a history and culture. The offer is still there. And we know time is on our side. The future of Ukraine belongs with the European Union.

In my daily dealings with the EU's 28 presidents and prime-ministers, I notice something else too. Whereas five years ago, if I may exaggerate, Ukraine was seen as of interest to Eastern Europeans alone, today all leaders – from Portugal to the Netherlands or Ireland – know well that events in Kiev are a matter of common concern. It is not just linked to the latest events. Almost all came to Vilnius in November last year for the EU summit with our Eastern neighbours.

Likewise, all now realise that turmoil in Northern Africa does not only impact Italy, Malta or Spain, but all of Europe. And I take this morning's strong statement by the German Foreign Minister as another sign of this important evolution. A shared neighbourhood, a shared responsibility.

For me, this neighbourhood includes Africa, a continent on the rise in many parts but in deep need elsewhere. As a Union we are present in crisis spots like the Central African Republic, Mali or the Somali waters, to help build security and fight extremism, and we do so together with the African Union and the United Nations – whose Secretary-General I warmly salute.

I know the EU is sometimes looked at as somewhat of a Florence Nightingale – after all we are the world's biggest donor of development- and humanitarian aid. But we do not just send nurses and nutritionists, we also send judges and policemen, soldiers and marines. In fact, we just decided to send in principle around six hundred troops to Bangui. They will work side by side with those of France. President Hollande and Foreign minister Fabius played a key role. Without them, that part of Africa would have descended into anarchy.

In the long run, helping combat poverty and lawlessness, restore a sense of justice and the rule of law, is the best remedy to the creeping menace of fanaticism and terrorism. That is true everywhere in the world. Nowhere will it be more true than in Syria, the biggest failure of the international community in decades.

Earlier this week I spoke to the President of the International Red Cross. Ten years ago, they were active in forty crisis situations. Today, from those forty, about thirty-five are still on the list, from Afghanistan to Sudan. It is an illusion to think problems can be solved by just nipping in and out. That is why we support a comprehensive approach. It is not "*doing the dishes*" as it was derided ten years ago; it is building the kitchen and training the cooks.

In any case, we use sanctions when they can make a difference as the oil-embargo did in the case of Iran, bringing the country back to a negotiation table – a table where EU High Representative Catherine Ashton played a crucial role. We clearly prefer diplomatic solutions, but our countries are ready to use military force when necessary. When it comes to defence, we know we will need to do more with less. European countries have security responsibilities to fulfil – as President Gauck said yesterday for Germany – and they need the means. I got the 28 Heads of EU countries together last December, to affirm their will to do more together. The NATO Secretary-General joined us and expressed his firm support.

Starting this year, Europeans will be launching new joint defence programmes, for cutting-edge drones, satellite communication, cyber defence and air-to-air refuelling. It is the start of a process. All these tools: at the service of Europe's interests and security.

It was the first time in five years that such a debate took place at the very highest level among European leaders. Before that, with the biggest economic and financial crisis since the 1930s, leaders had had other business at hand. But since a good year, the existential threat to the eurozone is behind us. Just last month a new country Latvia joined it. In the midst of turmoil in emerging markets, the euro is now a safe haven for investors! Our reforms are paying off, even if there is a lot of work ahead. But all main global actors have to reform, to make their economic and social models more sustainable.

The other issue where we are back to full speed is trade. The WTO Doha deal is obviously good news. As the world's biggest trade block we had not just been waiting. We are closing a deal with Canada, and are working on ones with Vietnam, India, Indonesia, Mercosur and Japan. But of course, the bedrock of the globalised economy being the EU-US economic relationship, the real game-changer in the making is 'TTIP'. Its economic impact will be big, but its significance goes beyond. It can dynamise our political relationship; and is a powerful sign to others too.

Because, Ladies and Gentlemen, for Europeans and Americans: economies based on rules, societies based on values – this is who we are, this is what we embody to so many, and what -together- we must stand for in the world. Thank you.