



European Council

The President

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Remarks by outgoing President Herman Van Rompuy at the handover ceremony with President of the European Council Donald Tusk

This is a special day. It is the first handover ceremony in the European Council since the Treaty of Lisbon. A new President is taking office.

It is a president coming from a country that, 25 years and a few weeks ago, was separated from the Union by the Iron Curtain. Now the favourite son of Poland is at the helm of the most important political institution of our Union. It really is a special moment.

It is special for Donald Tusk because he had to leave his beloved Poland to take up this high office. I remained in my own house, only 15 kilometres from here. Actually, this building is only a few hundred meters away from the park where I learned to walk!

But it is also a day of joy – even if it is the first day of freeze and with the feeling the winter finally arrived. I'm confident that the European Council is in good hands, in the hands of a man of experience and wisdom, a true European, an open mind and an open heart. The President of the European Council represents the Union as a whole: the East and the West, the North and the South, smaller and bigger countries, richer and poorer nations, the old and the new.

We Europeans are united by our values, which make our continent unique: our respect for every human person, without any exception or discrimination, translated in political democracy and a social market economy. We must defend those values against self-doubt, against outside pressure, even against fanatic barbarism. We must help those who are fighting to preserve or reconquer them. Much is at stake in the dangerous world we live in.

Europe can only remain stable if it remains an open space of freedoms, while also, more than today, becoming a place of protection – against threats and fears of all kinds. Europe can only preserve its social models with robust economic growth, with more jobs, and less inequality.

The European Council has a pivotal role in shaping this new face of our Union. Europe is old in historical terms but still capable to reinvent itself. It is not tired, and not retired. Even the past President is not tired, although retired since a few hours!

Mr. President, in front of you are men and women who are ready to help you, to support you in your new task. They serve, as you do, this great cause, the European cause. I can testify of their dedication and their sense of duty – and, a final time, I say to them, to you all, a deep-felt: Thank you, merci.

I personally leave this building with a good conscience over the work done, but aware of the tasks that await you in the years ahead. Four centuries ago, John Donne wrote: *“No man is an island, entire of itself. Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.”* Donald Tusk is the son of the great Polish nation. From now on, he will take care as a father of our great Union. Thank you.
