



European Council

The President

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Donald Tusk
President of the European Council
Speech at the National Opera House, Riga

Riga is the first national capital I visit as European Council president – and that is special to me. But tonight my heart is also in Paris, in solidarity with the victims and the families of the Charlie Hebdo attack. Today we can only repeat yesterday's headlines across the world, Je suis Charlie, and say: we are not afraid. We will not be intimidated by the brutal and violent attacks on our freedom. French, Latvian, Polish: we have all fought for the right to express ourselves freely. Indeed, this is the very reason why we have built the European Union, to effectively protect our values against all kinds of violence.

Today we can see clearly how challenging the year 2015 is going to be. Therefore, with even greater feelings of solidarity I wish the Latvian presidency all the best. You have set out an ambitious agenda for the next six months. I know that you are doing this for the first time. But there is no need for alarm: I am a first-timer, too. And as know, there is a first time for everything in life!

The New Year is traditionally when we take a hard look at ourselves. Some of us may have decided to quit smoking, or lose 5 kilos....

We have these great New Year resolutions – but they are often forgotten by the third week of January. (Watch out, we are already in the second week!)

That is why you could not have picked a better motto for your presidency.

Your Presidency agenda is a set of New Year's resolutions that we must, we will, keep – honestly.

This focus resonates perfectly with my hopes for the agenda of leaders in the European Council.

Let us honestly confront Europe's most pressing problems:

- Creating growth and new jobs.
- Modernising the European economy in digital commerce and in energy.
- Improving governance in our Economic and Monetary Union.
- Help Ukraine get back on its feet, and respond to the wider needs in our neighbourhood.

Again, this is not a wish-list, it is a to-do-list.

These things must be done, done well and done soon.

The task is enormous, in both statecraft and organisation. But I can already see how well-prepared you are: from my talks with Prime Minister Straujuma; from looking at your agenda; from your charming and clever movie promoting the Presidency.

I have very happy memories of my own experience of the Council Presidency in 2011 as Prime Minister of Poland. I can tell you that there is much hard work ahead, even for people as determined and energetic as the Latvians. But you will also enjoy it, especially after it is over.

Thank you very much. Lai Jums veicas!
