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WHAT CAN I DO FOR EUROPE?

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am not young anymore, I do not have the energy and enthusiasm of young idealists changing the world, but I have a lot of confidence in you, the young generation, being builders of an even better future for Europe.

I was asked to provide my insight on what you, young people can do for Europe and I will do it not only as a university professor, a member of parliament, but also as a father of my two daughters and a grandfather of my three grandchildren who live in Europe and care a lot about its future.

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Europe is going through difficult times and faces challenges on many fronts. In several Member States populists are growing in power and lure people to the idea that only strong nation states can protect them and secure their welfare. Many Europeans seem to be forgetting how things had been before the EU came into being and what the Union has brought them.

You will remember that the story of the 20th century European integration started with the European Coal and Steel Community, founded in 1951¹. In 1957, the Treaty of Rome established the European Economic Community (EEC) and a new stage of progressively closer cooperation in Europe². What we know today as the European Union was created with the aim of ending the frequent and bloody wars between neighbours, which culminated in the Second World War, the deadliest military conflict in history³. An estimated total of 70–85 million people perished in it. In my country, every family suffered terribly from this war. Poland lost in the World War II about 17% of its 1939 population⁴. And then, after the war, it remained under the Soviet domination and the communist rule until the fall of communism in 1989.

As you know, the original development of the European Union was based on a supranational foundation that would “make war unthinkable and materially impossible” and reinforce democracy amongst its members as laid out by Robert Schuman and other leaders in the Schuman Declaration.

The EU delivered on its objectives and in 2012 the EU was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The Nobel Committee applauded the EU for its contribution over six decades to “the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe” and for being instrumental in “transforming most of Europe from a continent of war to a continent of peace.”

The EU is, however, not an accomplished project, it has to be developed and strengthened every day.

What role can you play in all this? I would point out 3 main challenges that you must take:

¹ The Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community was signed on 18 April 1951. The European Coal and Steel Community itself came into being in 1952.

² The Treaty of Rome was signed on 25 March 1957. The EEC came into being in 1958.

³ See: History of the European Union – 1945–1959 | European Union (europa.eu) (access: 13.01.2023).

⁴ See: <https://wyborcza.pl/alehistoria/7,121681,17844725,ile-milionow-zginelo-ofiary-ii-wojny-swiataowej.html>; <https://www.fakt.pl/wydarzenia/ilu-ludzi-zginelo-w-czasie-ii-wojny-swiataowej-to-az-nieprawdopodobne/9nhzf5m> (access: 13.01.2023).

- 1) First, you should make use of the opportunities given by the European Union;
- 2) Second, you should contribute to further, sustainable development of Europe as a place where peace, understanding and unity in diversity are not just slogans;
- 3) Third, you should defend EU values in everyday life and during the elections.

- 1) Regarding the opportunities, I would like to share with you the experience of my generation.

I grew up in Poland, which at that time was part of the Eastern Block, stuck behind the so-called Iron Curtain. In general, when we were students, travelling abroad, studying and making friends in other countries was beyond our reach and, of course, we did not have the Internet.

Your situation is totally different. You can travel freely and study in other EU Member States.

Please, use this opportunity:

- to meet young people from different backgrounds and cultures,
- to become an expert in carrying out projects in international teams,
- to make lifetime friends,
- and to broaden your horizons.

EU projects and funding, common educational and scientific standards and simplified recognition of academic achievements make it possible to study and do research anywhere in the EU and then to pursue a successful career at home or abroad.

I therefore encourage you to make good use of the opportunities that are offered to you by the EU and to become truly European students.

2) Contributing to further, sustainable development of Europe will be more demanding. There are many dimensions to cover.

I firmly believe that highly motivated, passionate young people driven by values, can make a change for the better.

3) Remember, that each of you can protect and promote EU values on a daily basis:

- Support and develop civil society, take part in NGOs' activities;
- Express your opinions, have your say, take part in elections;
- Fight intolerance and hatred, accept differences in other people;

- Take care of those most vulnerable: children, elderly, handicapped, sick. They need your support. Be prepared to face the challenges of European societies getting older;
- Contribute to the social development of Europe;
- But do not forget its economic and technological development;
- Make use of the opportunities given by digitalisation, by the new technologies;
- Be creative. Be brave enough to shape the new reality;
- Remember that the UE is supporting social and technological innovation, start-ups, automatization;
- The Internet community gives you great opportunities. You can unite with people sharing your values. You can express yourself and your creativity. You can access information from all over the world. The Internet makes your learning opportunities limitless. In your own interest, defend the freedom of Internet. Do not let it be limited. Fight with preventive censorship, but also fight with hatred in the Internet. Do not let negative emotions spoil the miracle of the Internet;
- Also remember that we are a part of the environment we live in. Do not lose touch with the nature. Sustainable development requires eco-values to be promoted and implemented every day. You can contribute to the preservation of the EU ecosystems by small changes in your habits: recycle, save energy and water, and ... educate your parents on the importance of the little habits.

Europe is an amazing place and the European Union is a unique organisation integrating people on the basis of a common set of values, safeguarding peace and economic, technological and social development. This uniqueness must be preserved for generations to come.

Sadly, now some divisions are re-emerging, some black clouds have gathered, but we must remember that from a global perspective none of the EU Member States can compete with or stand up to such powers as the United States of America, China, India or Russia alone. Only united can we be a global player.

I trust that you, the young Europeans with values, can re-unite Europe. Your enthusiasm and your values, can give Europe a new momentum. Please, take the challenge!