

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With President Donald F. Tusk of the European Council and an Exchange With Reporters

March 9, 2015

President Obama. Well, it is a great pleasure to welcome Donald Tusk to the White House in his new role. I had outstanding experiences working with him during the time that he was Prime Minister of Poland, one of our closest allies, and was consistently impressed with his outstanding work and his strong support for the transatlantic alliance. We are very pleased that he is carrying on those same skills and values to the European Council.

And let me just say at the outset that I think transatlantic unity is as strong as it's ever been. We face a number of significant challenges. Obviously, a major topic of conversation today will be the situation in Ukraine. We are all committed to making sure that we uphold the basic principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity that have been threatened by Russian aggression. We've been able to maintain strong unity with respect to sanctions.

We very much appreciate the work that's been done by Chancellor Angela Merkel and President François Hollande to establish a Minsk process. But we also know from experiences over the last year that unless we have strong monitoring and strong implementation, that these agreements will be meaningless.

And so part of what we'll be discussing is how do we make sure that we are able to monitor effectively what's happening on the ground in Ukraine and how do we continue to maintain pressure on Russia, on the separatists, to abide by these agreements?

We'll also have an opportunity to talk about the significant challenges that the Ukrainian economy faces. We have to make sure that the 90 percent of Ukraine that is still effectively governed by Kiev is able to succeed. And that requires that we work together, Europe and the United States, to supplement the work that's being done by the IMF.

We'll also be talking about a wide range of other issues. We share concerns about global growth and the global economy, and this will be an opportunity for us to highlight the opportunities of strengthening trade through the transatlantic trade agreement that is currently being discussed between the two parties. We'll have a chance to discuss the situation in Greece and what more can be done to bolster European growth, which obviously has been lagging over the course of the last 7, 8 years and ends up having an impact on the world economy and the U.S. economy.

We'll have an opportunity to talk about some of the security challenges that we face both—beyond Ukraine, including the situation in Libya, the situation in Iraq, the need for us to be unified in our fight against ISIL, but also to work effectively to prevent foreign fighters from getting to Syria, as well as foreign fighters leaving Syria and coming back to Europe and the United States and potentially endangering our fellow citizens.

So we have a busy agenda. But I know that I've got a great partner and very much look forward to hearing Mr. Tusk's views on these very important issues.

So thank you.

President Tusk. Thank you, Mr. President. Good afternoon. First let me thank President Obama for inviting me in my new role as President of the European Council to Washington.

We think—we much—we have too much to discuss. However, I would like to pay attention—special attention—to three topics: namely, the critical relations with Russia in the Ukrainian context; the threat of terrorism and actions of the so-called Islamic State in the context, of course—in the context of Libya; and lastly, our negotiations on T-TIP, I mean, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership.

Although these are three different—very different—challenges, they have a common denominator, I think. It's a need, maybe greater than ever before, need for unity of Europe and the United States. We are witnessing today calling into question, and even attacking, of our fundamental values, like freedom, liberal democracy, prosperity, and for sure, geopolitical order.

And our enemies who use propaganda against us, commit acts of violence, and violate the sovereignty of our neighbors, they want to weaken the political community of the Western world. Today, we can see with full clarity that they are trying to divide us, inside of Europe, as well as Europe and America. But when we are united, we will be able to put a stop to the aggressive policy of Russia against her neighbors. And the past has shown that when we were united, we were able to successfully fight against terrorism. And also, thanks to the fact that we have acted together in the field, in the economy and free trade, we achieved success.

When it comes to T-TIP, getting agreement—it's my hope that we get an agreement. It's not so difficult—as difficult people think. We have very strong arguments. Of course, we need to balance the result of negotiations, for sure, and we have to convince our public opinion of—on both sides of the Atlantic. But we have strong arguments, and I believe that 2015, we—will be a crucial year in this process, because, in fact, T-TIP is not only about trade, but also about the chance of the jobs. And also, it's about geopolitical security and our transatlantic cooperation.

Second, we have to stop violent extremism spreading in Africa. We must help Libya because we cannot have a failed state run by warlords and fanatics sitting in anarchy just 100 miles off the southern coast of Europe.

And third, Ukraine, now, today, we are united on the need for full implement of the Minsk agreement and also on our determination to maintain the sanctions on Russia until the Minsk agreement is fully implemented.

It's a—brutal history is returned to us and to—brutal history and the politics of fait accompli. And this is why I think this is so important for Europe and for America that we have to not only speak in one voice, but also to act in unison, because who we are tomorrow depends on what we do today.

And I deeply believe that now is the best time to some kind of renaissance of faith in our community. And you Americans express this need, I think, in the most convincing phrase I know: "United we stand, divided we fall." This, I am convinced, it's true.

Thank you much.

President Obama. Thank you very much, everybody.

[*At this point, many reporters spoke at once.*]

Iran

Q. Mr. President, any reaction to the Republican letter to Iran?

President Obama. I'm sorry, what's that?

Q. The Republican letter to Iran?

President Obama. What about it?

Q. Could you comment on that?

President Obama. Well, I think it's somewhat ironic to see some Members of Congress wanting to make common cause with the hardliners in Iran. It's an unusual coalition. I think what we're going to focus on right now is actually seeing whether we can get a deal or not. And once we do, then we'll—if we do, then we'll be able to make the case to the American people, and I'm confident we'll be able to implement it.

All right. Thank you very much everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:12 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany; and President François Hollande of France. He also referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization.

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