

Speech by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland

Mateusz Morawiecki

Dear President Zelenskyy, Dear Volodymyr,

Dear Chancellor Scholz,

Dear President von der Leyen,

Dear President Metsola,

Dear Ukrainian friends,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Charlemagne is the patron saint of European unity.

Today, this unity is being put to the test.

In these uncertain, dark times, we need people willing to defend the ideals of European and Western civilisation. Volodymyr Zelenskyy is such a man.

After February 24th, it became clear that two visions were at odds with each other.

The first, Europe's dream of a community of sovereign nations in solidarity with one another concerning the common good.

The second, the Russian colonial and chauvinistic dream of power, resounding with imperialistic overtones and showing no regard for human life.

The Ukrainian nation's response to the Russian invasion has provided a strong impetus for the reintegration of the European Union.

Today, Ukraine is the outermost point of a united Europe. It is Ukraine, which defends our freedom at its frontiers.

Aachen is a city that symbolizes the unity of Europe. The tomb of Charlemagne is located in the cathedral here. The prize for Volodymyr Zelenskyy and admiration for the fighting spirit of Ukrainian nation invite us also to reflect on the sources of our Europeanness. Who are we? Who do we wish to avoid becoming? Let us look for answers to these questions.

If we want to describe the history of Europe in the last decades of the 20th century as briefly as possible, we can use the concepts of disintegration and reunification.

The Polish movement of Solidarność / Solidarity and the fall of the Berlin Wall became a symbol not only of the fall of totalitarian communist system, but also of the reunification of the whole of Europe.

The collapse of the Soviet Union was the beginning of a journey of the nations of our region towards unity in a common Europe. Annexed territories were returned to their rightful owners. And the nations of Europe could finally be returned to Europe.

What Europe means? Europe means cooperation above competition and unity in diversity.

The collapse of the Russian-Communist empire allowed a release of energy and hope that had been suppressed for many decades of enslavement. All Nation's hope for freedom, sovereignty and security.

Europe should resemble a local community. If a fire breaks out, neighbours come to each other's mutual aid, if someone gets sick, no one turns their backs on them.

The strength of European civilization is cooperation, its foundation is solidarity and its heart and driving force are the desire for freedom.

Europe is not just an old continent, a museum of beautiful ideas and values. Europe is a living community with a very rich cultural heritage that has radiated across the world for centuries.

Enlightenment thinkers – in the service of absolutist powers – divided Europe into East and West. This division was meant to justify the exploitation of Central and Eastern Europe by imperial Russia and give Westerners peace of conscience and a sense of moral superiority.

We need to revise that division. There is no place for the image of an “Uncivilized East” to which someone – preferably a strong man, a tyrant in the Kremlin – must bring order. Today the “Uncivilized East” is a barbaric Moscow that has become an inhumane land.

Neither Ukraine nor any Eastern European country is a “brother nation” of Russia. It is not “brotherhood”, but centuries of exploitation, colonization and imperialism.

The ancestors of today’s Poles, Ukrainians and citizens of many other nations lived in a common state. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was a political project that integrated various nations within one organism. Although it was an unfinished project, it was in fact one of the first attempts to build European unity. To build European unity in a peaceful way.

Let us recall the words of Robert Schuman. He wrote that “a united Europe [...] remains accessible to anyone who wishes to join it. Its *raison d'être* is solidarity and international cooperation”.

Now let me say a few words about Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Hero of Ukraine, role model for Europe.

Not since Winston Churchill walked the streets of London during the Nazi bombing, has the West had a leader who has so unquestionably risked his own life to defend his homeland.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy did not listen to those who advised him to leave Kyiv. We all remember his words: “The fight is here; I need ammunition, not a ride”. This call has not lost its relevance to this day.

In the first hours of the invasion, it became clear that Volodymyr Zelenskyy was a great European leader. He became a true hero within 24 hours.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy is the most outstanding leader on an international scale in the 21st century. His bravery has reminded European Union leaders of the importance of sovereignty and independence. It is a value for which nations are ready to shed blood in the 21st century.

Were it not for the heroic attitude of Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the European Union would now share a very long border with Russia. Putin would have gained the opportunity to destabilize not only our region, but all of Europe.

President Zelenskyy is a role model for every political leader. We can learn from him what true leadership is all about.

The war in Ukraine is an opportunity for the nations of Europe to engage in reflection; how can it return to the foundations of a united Europe.

There would possibly be no war if the temptation of domination had not prevailed over the principle of equality.

Hence, it is so important that we all show true solidarity and despite differences – such solidarity is shown by the European Council and the European Commission. I want to thank Ursula and Roberta and all other leaders for your determination and perseverance towards Ukraine and ask for more.

Our European humanism too often went hand in hand with a willingness to make a pact with evil. Compromise and appeasement, in such a context, only prolong conflict and the suffering that dictators inflict on innocent people. This was the case of Hitler prior to the Second World War. This was the case of Putin after Georgia and Donbas and Crimea 2014.

The attitude of the Ukrainian people, the solidarity of Poles with their neighbours, and finally the decisive response of the European Union to the call of defending Ukraine have proven that the greatness of Europe is still alive and well.

It is the ability to reach consensus, to get rid of the temptation of domination by the strong over the weak, that distinguishes the free nations of Europe from Russia's Empire of Evil.

In Europe there are no longer masters and subjects, no longer a centre and its periphery. There is also no room for hegemony. Ukraine longs for such a Europe – a community of sovereign nations.

President Zelenskyy reminds us that every nation's voice should be listened to with equal attention.

Russia is anti-Europe, the antithesis of the commonwealth. Its barbaric attack on Ukraine reminded us that political thinking does not invalidate moral categories. The war that is a manifestation of the eternal conflict between good and evil.

Good has the face of Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the defenders of Ukraine.

Europe upholds the dignity of the human person, freedom of speech and the separation of religious and temporal powers. In Russia, these values have been trampled. In Russia, the citizen is a mere pawn, speaking the truth is a crime pursued by the censors, and the church is an organ of the state.

Europe must resist Russia, because Russia today is the negation of Europe. In Russia, the order of values has been overturned completely: lying is called truth, Ukrainians are called Nazis, enslavement is called liberation, and an unwarranted invasion is called a "special operation".

Russia's legacy is only common misery, common enslavement and common suffering.

We must not lose sight of the vision of a Europe united but rich in diversity, a Europe in which all countries, regardless of their size and economic potential, have equal rights. Finally, of a Europe bound together by solidarity.

Dear Volodymyr, when we came to the besieged Kyiv two and a half weeks of the war, I assured you we would not abandon you. It was your personal courage and fortitude which was key to defending Ukraine. Therefore, today's ceremony is one of the symbolic examples of Ukraine's integration into the European family.

Europe will only become fully united when Ukraine joins as a full-fledged member of the European Union. I know it is your dream and it is our desire, too.

As long as Ukraine is divided, Europe is divided. As long as Ukrainians give their lives for our freedom, the hearts of Europe bleed.

We must also not forget the thousands of Ukrainian children kidnapped by Russia. As we express the hope that Ukraine will soon be free, we speak also for them.

Today, once again, we as a European community stand before a test. We must learn from the harsh lessons of history. Now. Before it is too late.

Let's give today's winner something more than a prize. Let's give him and the Ukrainian nation our full support. Only in this way we will truly strengthen peace and security in Europe.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy is the man who reminded us that the president is more than an office. It is to be with his people to death and life.

In the centre of Berlin there was a sign "Das ist nicht unser Krieg / This is not our war". One word of that sign was changed by someone, and it now says: „Das ist auch unser Krieg / This is also our war".

The anonymous graffiti expresses what too many people are still afraid to admit: yes, this war concerns us all.

This war will decide what kind of Europe our children will live in.

Will it be a Europe that has shattered the legacy of freedom? Or the Europe that restored order to the world?

This is perhaps the most important test of our lives. And we are running out of time. Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his nation need our action here and now. Let us stand for freedom. Let us stand for Ukraine. Let us stand for Europe.