

**KEY NOTE ADDRESS BY H.E. MR. MIROSLAV LAJČÁK,  
MINISTER OF THE FOREIGN AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS  
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC,**

**AT BERLIN FOREIGN POLICY FORUM**

**UNITE OR DECLINE: EUROPE'S FUTURE IN AN UNRULY WORLD**

*Excellencies, dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,*

First of all, many thanks to the Körber-Stiftung for this invitation.

There are not many places better positioned to discuss the European unity and division than Berlin. For 28 years, a wall not far from here divided the city. The country. The continent. And the world.

Who knows better than Berliners the pain of division and the joy of unity?

For many years, the word “**wall**” symbolized divisions, darkness, decline. And then people said, enough. Walls don't belong to Europe. Walls don't belong to the world. Walls belong to the past. And so we tore them down. We built a Union with no borders, no walls. And it grew and prospered. United, in a rules-based order.

It's 2018 and we hear the word “wall” dominating news again. We are losing one of our members. Voices advocating nationalism and divisions are gaining strength. Truth and expertise are losing value. Instead of removing the remaining barriers to our integration, we are building new ones.

**So today, I will talk about walls of 2018.** And I have **3** messages I want to share with you.

**First**, we are hearing “the wall” presented as a sign of strength. But

**1. Wall is a sign of weakness.**

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While in the past, the walls protected people from the outside threats, in 2018, any sense of protection walls provide is just an illusion. Walls don't protect us. They separate us. They blind us. Prevent us to see the real problem.

We must realize that building walls does not make problems disappear. It's a placebo. Temporary, unsustainable placebo. Unless we want to live in medieval world again, we should forget about walls.

Today, the real strength lies in cooperation. Courage and ambition. We can overcome challenges only with **p**atience, willingness to understand and skill to deal with them. Not by building walls to cement our positions.

I know it's hard. Sometimes it seems impossible to understand. Simply because the history of this continent was a very diverse one. We come from different circumstances, speak different languages and different generations remember different stories.

Like, the other day, my daughter saw *Ein Kessel Bunt* on youtube. And she asked me what was wrong with us. [Laugh] I said: “nothing”. But then I actually watched the video and was in hard position to argue. But at the same time, we were young.

Different generations tell different stories. In 2018, we cannot fully appreciate the courage of those who tore down walls within the EU and created 4 freedoms. We got used to it.

And now it seems as if many were ready to build walls again. We cannot let that happen. We cannot let our divisions blind us to a simple fact: Europe has never been more free, prosperous and secure than today, when we form a community of values.

Yet this is definitely not an easy time for our community. Why? Why is our member leaving? Why is Euroscepticism on the rise and far-right parties are gaining strength? Why, when we have all the pragmatic arguments advocating integration.

I would answer that it is because for the past 9 years, the headlines on EU affairs were dominated by one word. CRISES. We went from financial crises of 2009, to migration crisis of 2015 to Brexit and crises of trust of today. And we survived them, but we haven't really resolved them.

Take these past 2 years. We have dedicated most of our political time and efforts and employed our best diplomats to define relationship with the one of us who has decided to leave.

We spoke about inner agendas, rather than about specific solutions for our citizens. When they do not feel the relevant contributions, when they do not feel that our Union is strong and has people in its focus, they start to doubt. And somehow, we are not successful in dissolving these doubts. Instead, while we stumble, others are stepping in, offering false promises and unviable alternatives.

We face those narratives, but we are so preoccupied with defending existing structures and institutions, we have almost no time left to build them up with our own projects. What will history books write about us? About our achievements.

Will this generation tear apart what the fathers of the European integration have built? To quote my daughter: what's wrong with us? I think, it is the walls. They prevent us from expanding our vision. Walls separate people from within - rather than protect against the outside. Why?

Because

## **2. Threats don't respect walls.**

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And that is my second point today. No wall can stop threats of this century. There is a spectrum of issues truly global in their nature.

Climate change – and how it affects the most vulnerable societies. Poverty and hunger – and how they fuel migration. Inequality –and how it fuels radicalization and terrorism. They pass through any wall.

The only way is working together. Cooperation. Multilateralism. Compromise. No European nation, not Slovakia, not even Germany, is large and strong enough to withstand the pressure alone.

If we want to face these challenges, or quite honestly – if we want to survive, we need a strong Union as a global actor in political affairs. Divided Europe is not only weak, but it upsets geopolitical balance.

Global atmosphere today is characterized by raise of new powers and by leadership vacuums. We need Europe capable to fill them. We need Europe positioned alongside the US, China, Russia and other emerging players. Not squeezed between them.

Only in this role can Europe do its job, not only for itself, but also for equilibrium of international power. If we are pinned against each other within our own space – major powers are swift to seize the opportunity. **Divided Europe helps no one in Europe.**

Division is never the “end state” of affairs. Remember the old Latin: *Divide et impera*. Division is always followed by domination. And people know it. Friends as well as adversaries. The only domination we should accept for Europe is domination of law, justice, equality, freedom and democracy.

Effective protection against threats of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is cooperation. Any wall is a limit. Which brings me to my third point. Walls divide us. Limit us. But

### **3. Not every wall is made of bricks.**

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And that is the third point I want to make today.

Sometimes we build walls in our minds. We build walls of ignorance, arrogance, stereotype. And these are much harder to tear down.

It has been 14 years since the big enlargement and we need to quit the mentality of “*old and new*”. Just as in EU also in Germany - many after unification we still heard voices echoing divisions. *East and West. Rich and poor.*

These mental walls cause so much damage to the Union. Just remember how Brexit started. We need to leave these old patterns of thinking. We are a Union with a single market and the lines that divide us are neither geographical, nor economic.

The real divisions now are between those who believe in Europe and those who don't. Those who tell the truth based on facts and those who don't. Those willing to cooperate and those are not. Those seeking understanding – and others who don't care.

And I believe that all of us here in this room do care and want to understand. And the only way to understand is to talk and listen. The real dialogue is the real way how to tear down false stereotypes, old prejudices and walls inside us.

We don't need a wrecking ball. We need to work together, treat each other as equals and with respect and play by the rules we ourselves created.

*Ladies and gentlemen...*

To conclude, let me come back to the beginning. To the title of this event: “Unite or Decline: Europe’s Future in an Unruly World”

Let’s dissect its 3 key words. **Unite - Decline – Unruly.**

**First, UNITE.** Europe’s prosperity and security is linked to its UNITY. We must constantly explain to our citizens that those who challenge the Union in fact endanger people’s prosperity and security. Alternatives they offer are unsustainable and dangerous. That is why false prophets could not outline their vision. They don’t have any. What they offer – is **DECLINE.**

The **second** word. Europe’s prosperity and security is also linked to freedom and human rights. Have you heard any of these false prophets – along with their ideas of nationalism, isolation and protectionism, as they like to say: “real sovereignty” – talk about freedom and human rights? Freedom needs champions. Human rights need champions. Without them - our human dignity will decline.

The **third** word is **UNRULY.** The complex institution such as EU needs rules. The complex organism such as a human being needs rules. Unruly is an inevitable decline of any form. Diplomats bear special responsibility. We negotiate rules. People naturally expect us to be the first to observe them. We have to be the first line of defense of a rules-based world.

When we close our eyes to our own faults and mistakes, when talking about them becomes politically incorrect, it doesn’t make them disappear. It doesn’t mean that others don’t see them. Especially those, to whom we so often preach about our values. If this is the case - decline starts with us.

*Dear friends,*

Before I leave the podium, I want to acknowledge the role of Germany in advocating for an inclusive Europe, reconciliation, cooperation and compromise. For being the force to pull together, not apart. No matter the political cost. This has been crucial in the past years and months.

We welcome continued leadership of Germany. Europe needs it.

*Thank you.*