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Agram

Vielen Dank für Ihre netten Worte, lieber Herr Professor Lendvai,
liebe Frau Präsidentin, Frau Ministerin Schwarz,
sehr geehrter Herr Landeshauptmann, lieber Herr Pröll,
sehr geehrte Kollegen Minister, lieber Sebastian, lieber Lazar, lieber Daniel,
sehr geehrter EU Kommissar, lieber Johannes,
lieber Herr Abt,
liebe Freunde,
Exzellenzen,

es ist mir eine Ehre, heute bei Ihnen sein zu dürfen, eingeladen worden zu sein als kroatischer Außenminister. Ich habe mit sehr viel Aufmerksamkeit den Worten gelauscht von Professor Lendvai. Was ich Ihnen sagen kann, dass in Kroatien – wie auch anderswo – es nicht einfach ist. Es ist turbulent, aber in Kroatien, in einem kerneuropäischen Land, werden auch die wahren Werte Europas kultiviert, und ich persönlich setze mich dafür tagtäglich ein, das ist unsere Verantwortung von uns Politikern in Kroatien.

Ich werde aber heute meine Rede in englischer Sprache halten, die wurde so vorbereitet, und ich halte mich auch daran. Die Beamten im Außenministerium sind sehr präzise, und ich bitte um Nachsicht, wenn ich in englischer Sprache weitermache. Ist das für Sie in Ordnung? Dankeschön.

My first message is that we in the EU know the value of both unity and diversity. Our history was one of ending the divisions and wars and embarking on a process of an ever closer union. Despite numerous crises in the European history, the EU has proved over time that, when focused on a strategic goal, it is able to deliver and find a way out, usually by becoming even more resilient and better prepared for future crises.

The phrase “United in diversity” is abundant with meaning. It is the best epitome for Europe, its values, and its cultural, Christian and humanist

heritage, history and identity. It is our DNA and what we stand for. It personifies the vision of our founding fathers – Schuman, De Gasperi and Adenauer – for the people of Europe. While being proud of their national identities and history, they were ready to transcend their divisions and united to forge a common destiny.

But, let us be clear – unity and union do not mean uniformity. And diversity does not mean division. Striving for an ever closer Union does not mean forgetting your country or your national interests.

There are two pivotal building blocks that testify to this – our evolution and our values.

As to our evolution: Let's not overlook what Europe has achieved so far. We can be proud of it. The European Union is a success story. For over half a century the European Union has been creating for its citizens an area where peace, freedom, human dignity and prosperity have not only been ideals, but also standards.

The European continent has been experiencing the longest period of peace in history. This was justly recognized by the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the European Union in 2012, but it is also felt by a large majority of European citizens that believe in peace and democracy as the most important achievements of the European Union.

We often tend to take for granted that we can trade freely across our continent, or move freely and study freely. The European Union has come a long way to get to this point. It has done so based on unity of purpose and solidarity through cooperation and compromise-building. There were times when the integration process was advancing faster and times when we needed a reflection. What is important is that the ultimate vision of our founding fathers has never been forgotten. It is this clear sense of direction that we need to revisit today. Of course the Union is far from being perfect, which recurrent crises of the last few years have aptly proved, but the question is – have we got today something better? Is it easier to complain, or work hard and make improvements?

As to values: The European Union is about values. It was built on values. Values are its *raison d'être*. Our over-arching value is a sense of responsibility – for the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and economic betterment, for solidarity with humans living in precarious conditions and for common issues concerning our planet.

It is these values that we all share and that are binding us together. It is these values that justify the EU's voice to be more prominent abroad. It is these values that give us the responsibility to protect them and promote them outside the European Union. It is these values that give legitimacy to defending our interests globally.

It is for the sake of these values that my country Croatia joined the European Union and reunited with its European family. In 1990 after the first free elections at the end of May joining the European family was the third most important goal of the then newly elected Croatian government.

And finally, it is those very values, foundations of our integration that are put to a serious test today. This is the most serious internal challenge for the European Union, the one that will require deep reflection on the crucial questions of the EU's *raison d'être*.

As many times in our history, I am confident, I am sure, I am convinced that we will overcome these challenges. We should be able to talk and to listen and to hear each other's different opinions, and be able to make compromises where necessary for a greater good.

If we forget to communicate and cooperate, if we concentrate only upon our own needs, we cannot succeed. The challenges of this century are in a large part either global or transnational, and the European Union remains an unprecedented forum of cooperation. The Union is sometimes criticized for its "slowness", for its "passivity", but this is a price of listening, of thinking, of compromising, of trying to find the best solutions.

Croatia will contribute strongly its share to the achievement of the European Union's unity. We want to actively contribute to the development of the

European Union, to advancing its stability and prosperity and to promoting our values. Croatia's EU membership was a realisation of our most important foreign policy goal as Professor Lendvai rightly mentioned. Peace, security and prosperity have been and will remain important goals of our EU membership.

In this sense Croatia sees itself at a specific geopolitical crossroad, where it can facilitate vertical cooperation – with our friends in Central Europe and the Mediterranean and on to the Baltic, as well as horizontal cooperation, with our friends in South East Europe and beyond.

I believe that the Croatian initiative Adria – Baltic – Black Sea is also of a significant importance in additional strengthening of partnership between our countries present at this Forum today – Austria, Bulgaria, Romania and, of course, Croatia. Main transport corridors as well as energy infrastructure present fundamental security issue and necessary basis for a stronger economic development and growth. Croatia is committed to deepen and intensify our cooperation in order to explore common interests in different areas of EU policies as well as in supporting further enlargement processes.

My second message is that we are better off together. If it wants to be an important player – in terms of economy, security and politics – in today's globalized society, Europe must work and act together. Without unity, there will be no real Europe.

The today's world is more complex, more insecure and more unpredictable than ever. In other words – it is more challenging. And today's challenges are too big and too interconnected for individual states to address on their own as Commissioner Hahn rightly mentioned, when he spoke about Africa and possibly migration flows from Africa.

The outside factors have more and more impact on our inside. Just think of the financial and economic crisis, terrorism, migration, energy security, climate or environment.

Our resilience – internal and external – is being seriously tested. When it

comes to European instability we have powers from our side financing political parties in all European nations. So we are challenged also by that kind of attempts to destabilize European Union. We should not forget that.

What have we learned over the last period? Let's use the case of the migration crisis. First, the solution is not to look away. Second, the solution is neither to shut down and be passive. Third, it is neither to turn inwards and cater of your own problems. We cannot afford this. We have greater responsibilities.

It is fair to admit that since the beginning of the migration crisis, European Union countries have sometimes struggled to find an adequate and common approach. Harsh words were exchanged last year. But the most obvious fact remains – no matter how you decide to tackle the migrant crisis, no matter whether you are in the heart of Europe or on the external borders of the European Union, nobody can tackle this situation alone. It is only together within the European Union and through cooperation with our international partners that we can help ourselves, help others and ensure fulfilment of our objectives.

We are now quite sure that we live as you say in German in a „Schicksalsgemeinschaft“. The European Union is a Schicksalsgemeinschaft, clearly.

In our action we should be guided by our interests and principles, of which unity, responsibility and credibility remain crucial. We need to be able to speak with a common voice through a shared perspective, aims and priorities.

Faced with the migrant crisis, some far-reaching decisions were taken by the European Union. Many new proposals are on the table, which, if agreed and properly implemented, will bring a more coherent European response.

Besides and in addition to the EU-Turkey Plan, the protection of external borders remains the key. Croatia is actively participating in common European activities aimed at strengthening the EU external borders, preventing fragmentation of the former Western Balkans route and fighting

human traffickers and migrant smugglers. We will continue to give our unequivocal support for all the envisaged activities, which are of vital importance for coping efficiently with the current migration challenges.

In this context I would like to mention that we established last year a very efficient cooperation with two EU Member States, Austria and Slovenia, and the two Non-EU Member-States, two candidate countries, Serbia and Macedonia, and it is due to that cooperation that the numbers of migrants and refugees coming to the European Union had gone down significantly.

I am grateful especially to Sebastian Kurz for having established that cooperation and when we saw each other in February in Amsterdam it is basically – if I may say so, Sebastian – on the proposal of Mr. Erjavec from Slovenia and myself that Sebastian decided to organize a conference in Vienna at the end of February, if I remember well, concerning the migration crises.

So we have due to that cooperation helped toward to find a solution for the migration crises and I know that our German friends didn't say openly but there were many of them who told us unofficially that they were quite thankful for our countries having shown to cooperate very efficiently.

We should also mention in this context Macedonia. We should continue to help them. We are looking forward to finding a solution for them. They should get the possibility to start to negotiate on their membership in the European Union.

Croatia, being fully aware of the necessity to better protect and manage the external EU borders, and we will, of course, give our full support for the preservation of Schengen, Schengen is something which is important for our citizens, as well as the agreement on the reform of Dublin system, where the EU's ability to reach a deal will be of particular importance.

These are all pointers advocating for a dynamic European Union, an assertive and engaged European Union. An European Union that would take the lead within the international community and advance our interests. An

European Union that would nurture finding common solutions, collective and coordinated approaches. An European Union that would get the credit and visibility we deserve, we – nicht die, as Johannes said, wir gehören dazu – the one that corresponds to our contribution.

The forthcoming EU Global Strategy which is being elaborated by our friend Federica Mogherini should provide the framework for this to materialise. It should be an instrument for strengthening cooperation, unity of vision and action and solidarity, a tool that will strengthen the European Union and its Member States. It should ensure coherence of our vision and action in a true comprehensive approach, but it should also provide for instruments and resources for the European Union to be a global player and leader.

My third message is about security. It is the most important and most cherished commodity.

Crises are all over the place, internally like today in Croatia and externally. As we were trying to build a ring of friends, we have ended up being surrounded by a ring of crises, in our neighbourhood and globally. The degradation of the global security environment, in particular to the East and to the South, calls for a stronger and more resilient European Union but also for a more comprehensive and synchronised relationship and cooperation with the United Nations and NATO.

Building security starts at home. The EU must become more resilient from within. It is like in a plane – we had this metaphor – first we have to put your own oxygen mask before assisting others.

Internally, we are continuously faced with challenges and crises. The European Union experienced many in the course of its history, and has so far always been able to learn from them. If you look at the nineties we had Maastricht, we had the wars in the former Yugoslavia, we had the Treaty of Nice, when there were insults between the leaders of the biggest countries, we had the referendum in the Netherlands and the Constitution, we had the referendum in France, and nonetheless, the European Union is still here. We

had the debt crises, we had the Euro crises, Institution crises, Lisbon Treaty, we had the referendum in Ireland, and nonetheless the European Union is still here. So we are strong. And we should also speak about the good things in Europe, not only speak about the bad things.

For some, it seems, the European project has lost its appeal. There is also scepticism or enlargement fatigue within the European Union about further enlargements. However, we should not give up so easily from one of the most successful policies of the European Union. Enlargement has changed the European continent. It has turned it into the continent of peace, democracy, respect for the rule of law and human rights.

Croatia my country will continue to be a “guardian” of the enlargement policy, its firmest supporter and promoter. We shall continue to stress the importance of its transformative power, and the need for this policy to continue to be strict and fair, and based on individual merit, conditionality and fulfilment of criteria. Rule of law, good governance and the acceptance of European values should continue to be the pillars of the accession process.

The continuation of the enlargement policy is also important for the European Union itself. It shows that the European Union is still attractive and it has really “soft power” as Mr. Nye uses to say. And it is an investment into our own stability and security and security and resilience of our neighbours.

Both the European Union and the South-East European countries share the common strategic interest of ensuring the lasting stability for that part of Europe. In this regard, our South-Eastern neighbours and friends can expect from us to support them on their European path and in the process of adaptation to European standards.

But at the same time, they have to be aware that they are obliged to implement reforms, to fully meet all the requirements for membership and to adapt to EU standards, which, I am sure, will be a demanding and sometimes even painful task. The specificity of the South-East European countries is that the accession process itself correlates with their social

transformation and stabilization of their political situation. In a certain way, it serves as a kind of catharsis that should help them to come to terms with some of the issues from the past and that should lead to good neighbourly relations on more solid foundations.

Going further to the East and to the South, the European Union needs to continue addressing political, security and humanitarian challenges, in particular in Syria, Iraq and Libya. As much as we need to continue dealing with the consequences created by the migration crises and terrorism, including through increased stabilisation efforts, we also have to address their root causes. We have to act on the ground, we have to show that we are mature. This is the only way leading to sustainability and long term peace and security and preventing those countries and societies slipping away.

The current refugee and migration crisis illustrates that only a comprehensive and strategic development approach can be effective to tackle the root causes. It must encompass a variety of aspects (security, humanitarian, economic, trade, education and cultural), involve civil society and private sector, ensure better coherence with other EU policies with external dimension as well as better linking of various instruments and funds.

In other words, it requires a true comprehensive approach, a true European approach. We always have problems in the European Union, we are used to that having problems but in the end after our internal struggles we always reach an European, a common European approach and the best example is the migration crises.

Wir haben indirekt ungewollt zu einer Lösung gefunden, einerseits durch die Zusammenarbeit auf der sogenannten Balkan-Route zwischen Österreich, Slowenien, Kroatien, Serbien, Mazedonien und andererseits natürlich durch den EU-Türkei-Deal, aber wir haben es geschafft, wir sind kurz vor einer wirklich gemeinsamen Lösung, und wir sollten darauf stolz sein, dass es uns wiederum gelungen ist, aus dieser schwierigen Lage herauszukommen.

Wir haben jetzt noch das Referendum, das auf uns wartet, in Großbritannien. Meine persönliche Überzeugung ist, dass die Briten in der Europäischen

Union bleiben werden, sie werden uns nicht verlassen, das ist gut für die Europäische Stabilität, die Stabilität unseres Kontinents, und ich glaube, dass es auch gelingen wird, mittelfristig die Schuldenkrise in den Griff zu bekommen.

Wir haben einige Metaphern heute gehört. Meine Metapher ist für Europa: Europa ist wie eine Wohngemeinschaft mit verschiedenen Wohnungen. Es gibt große Wohnungen, zum Beispiel unsere Freunde in Deutschland haben eine sehr große Wohnung, die Österreicher eine kleinere Wohnung, wir Kroaten eine noch kleinere Wohnung.

Es gibt da gemeinsame Regeln für diese Wohngemeinschaft, die ist attraktiv, wir sind nicht alle gleich reich. Es gibt reichere Mieter, es gibt auch Mieter, die sind weniger reich, das ist so, aber wir haben gemeinsame Regeln, wir sollten uns daran halten, und diese Wohngemeinschaft bietet uns allen Schutz und Komfort.

Wir sollten also alle uns darum bemühen, in dieser Wohngemeinschaft zu bleiben, sie zu hüten, sie nicht kaputt machen zu lassen.

Ich habe es auch erwähnt, Herr Präsident, weil ich erwähne das zum dritten Mal, man redet über Kroatien, aber wenn wir uns anschauen diese ganzen populistischen Bewegungen, die entstanden sind in Westeuropa, jetzt mittlerweile breiten sie sich auch aus auf Mitteleuropa und wir, zu denen ich mich zähle, wir überzeugten Europäer müssen dagegen kämpfen. Das gehört zu unserem politischen Leben, das werden wir auch tun, weil diese Wohngemeinschaft eine Schicksalsgemeinschaft ist.

Wir müssen sie aufrecht erhalten, und das ist auch die große Verantwortung für diese Generation in Europa, und deswegen bin ich sehr glücklich, dass wir heute in der Wachau, in der Wacháu – wie Sie sagen hier in Österreich – auch darüber sprechen können. Europa muss erhalten bleiben. Europa ist eine Erfolgsstory, das muss uns bewusst sein.

Natürlich müssen wir über die Probleme reden, die wir in Europa heutzutage haben. Es gibt sie. Wir brauchen mehr Transparenz, wir brauchen einen neu-

en Kompetenzkatalog, da bin ich auch Ihrer Meinung, aber wir sollten ruhig auch über die guten Seiten Europas sprechen, wir sollten darauf stolz sein.

Wenn wir ein bisschen ins Ausland fahren, ich war neulich in Israel, ja, in Israel spricht man über die Europäische Union trotz der Probleme. Es gibt trotzdem sehr viel Respekt. Europa hat „soft power“. Wir sollten uns darüber im Klaren sein und sollten alles dafür tun, um dieses Europa zu erhalten.

Vielen Dank!