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President for "Financial Times": Poland is still pro-European

Poland underwent a political sea change last year with the election of a conservative president and a government led by the Law and Justice party. The wishes of the Polish people were clear: a single party enjoys an absolute majority for the first time in the country's recent history.

A string of reforms has since been initiated and there are many issues that require our attention. A majority of Poles have lost trust in the judiciary, according to a number of surveys. They are unhappy about the domestic healthcare system and clamour for changes in education. They want a modernised army. They are weighed down by red tape and a byzantine tax system that makes starting a business and creating jobs extremely difficult. Finally, Polish citizens feel increasingly apprehensive about the immigration crisis that threatens to spiral out of control across Europe and the spectre of terrorism that haunts the continent.

In the past few years millions of young Poles have emigrated to the UK, Ireland and other European countries. Sadly, there were no viable employment opportunities in their homeland. Poland has suffered from a debilitating brain drain and we have to change this.

Under previous governments, the official economic statistics looked good but were misleading. Gross domestic product grew steadily but so did social inequalities. Big cities were booming but many Poles were not benefiting from the post-communist economic transition.

Conservative journalists were purged from public-owned media and a few dozen were placed under surveillance. Cronyism was rampant and corruption scandals proliferated to such an extent that growth was affected.

Admittedly, in the past few weeks Poland has seen a series of anti-government protests. Like any well-functioning democracy, we believe that all the participants have the right to vent their anger openly.

Moreover, in both private and public media, pluralism is now not only standard practice, it is thriving. You can ferociously attack the government if you wish or you can defend it. You can praise the relocation quotas for immigrants or criticise the very idea. You can be a Brussels-loving federalist or a staunch Eurosceptic. Democracy and free media in Poland are not endangered in the least.

We are and will remain pro-European. Poland wishes to maintain a friendly and fruitful relationship with all our partners in Europe. This is particularly true of Germany, given our proximity and our recent history of successful political and economic co-operation.

We would also like to play a more active role in solving the EU's most troubling problems. I am profoundly concerned about the recent terrorist attacks that have claimed the lives of many innocent Europeans. I understand the anxiety of French, German and British citizens who fear for their security. Dispelling those fears and ensuring that Europeans feel safe again must be a priority for EU leaders.

The refugee crisis should be tackled more vigorously, too. We need a frank debate about how to deal with uncontrolled mass immigration. But first of all we must strengthen our external borders. Poland fulfils all its obligations in this respect, monitoring the 1,100km EU border.

Nonetheless, we cannot forget that another menace is looming. In the past few years we have seen one of our neighbours pursuing an aggressive foreign policy. The EU's relations with countries that trample on international law should be regarded as a test of solidarity for all member states. I will not waver in my belief that business interests should not prevail over European values.

Europe must therefore adapt to the new geopolitical circumstances. Nato's eastern flank should be reinforced. The alliance has to rebuild its deterrent capabilities. Defence expenditures must be increased. The Nato summit to be held in Warsaw in July will be a milestone in the shaping of this collaborative approach.

Peace, security and community: together we can cement these values as the three pillars of Europe's future.

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