

Dear ladies and gentlemen, dear friends and colleagues

During the last decade the EU has changed.

Financial crisis, migratory crisis and Brexit have created something different than the EU we knew after the fall of the Berlin wall and big enlargement. Huge optimism and strong conviction that EU, now whole and free, will become a world champion, able to shape the globalization, was replaced with overwhelming feeling of uncertainty and skepticism. Some old divisions surfaced again and new ones appeared. Despite all, optimism and hope exist and vast majority of European population still believe that the EU, wisely managed, is more of a solution than a problem.

This hope is crucial, because the biggest challenges in decades, maybe in the entire history of the EU are ahead of us.

Demography is our most important strategic challenge.

Digital Europe is our key to growth and jobs tomorrow.

Preserving the creation and protecting our European way of life is precondition for everything else. If we fail, after a while, socialists will have nothing to promote.

A new Commission president included all these strategic challenges into her program for the next 5 years which is a source of optimism. And I congratulate her for this courage. Our task is to collect enough political power behind her program to be implemented fully and on time.

This new era demands new answers, new policies and a strong leadership.

Unfortunately, after the last EU elections, the EU parliament is more fragmented and not more focused or united. And this is not the worst part of the problem.

If we want a strong and effective EU, we also need a strong and stable member states. Currently, almost half of the governments in our member states have minority or technical governments. Some of them are even composed (of coalition of losers?) from joint/united? losers of national elections. Grand coalitions are collapsing, new political forces surfaced and new reality can not be managed by old concepts and obsolete political tools.

This is why I wish to our new president Donald wisdom and a lot of political and personal courage. There is not only one, there are 27 battlefields to fill and as many battles to win. This means that we have to respect historical differences and at the same time avoid using double standards. Some of us were born in welfare and some in dictatorships. The fall of the Berlin wall 30 years ago was not the end but only the beginning of the democratic transition. The west part of Europe has to help us to finish it and not vise a versa. This is especially important when we treat a new EU applicant countries from our eastern neighborhood and Western Balkans.

There are tasks which are difficult, demanding and time wasting. And there are tasks which could be easily implemented if there is enough political will. Lets start with them. Let's keep our promises and start negotiations with Northern Macedonia.

Bolgaria, Romania and Croatia have all fulfilled criteria for Schengen area. Let them in, and security in entire EU will improve.

I want to thank ~~to~~ Joseph Daul especially for his support 5 years ago when national elections in Slovenia were stolen and when he was one of the only few EU politicians not prepared to use double standards. I also thanks ~~to~~ our host party, Croatian HDZ for a warm hospitality. Puno hvala.

And I wish very a successful first Croatian EU presidency to prime minister Andrej Plenković. Sretno, Andrej!