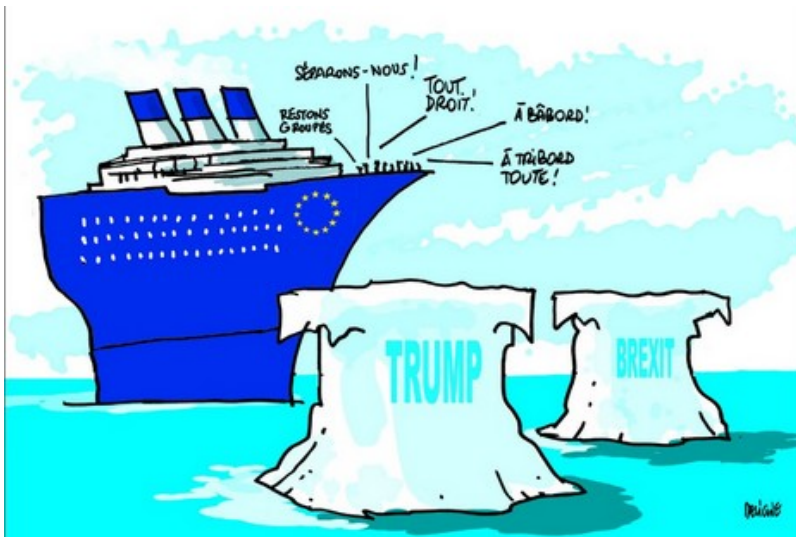


EU between cohesion and discord at Malta summit



Ahead of Friday's informal summit meeting in Valletta, European Council President Donald Tusk made a strident call for unity and pride. It was a response to Brexit and to Donald Trump's provocations.

In the face of attempts to destabilize the European Union, the bloc must close ranks. This was Donald Tusk's response to US President Donald Trump's prediction of the union's disintegration. In the run-up to today's summit in Valletta, the Polish European Council president set the tone on Tuesday by sending a solemn letter to the leaders of member states. "In a world full of tension and confrontation, what is needed is the courage, determination and political solidarity of Europeans," he wrote.

The summit in the Maltese capital takes place in two stages: kicking off this morning with 28 states, including the United Kingdom; then continuing in the absence of British Prime Minister Theresa May. Will this meeting lead Europeans to pull together? Europeans who are preparing to launch a new roadmap in March, in conjunction with the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome?

"Let's have the courage to be proud of our own achievements, which have made our continent the best region in the world," wrote Tusk. In another missive penned before the Bratislava summit in September 2016, he stressed the need for Europeans to restore security, both external and internal, and to preserve social protections. Nothing is less certain, however, than unity. In the Slovak capital, some leaders refused to share the same floor with others because of disagreements over immigration and economic policies. The recent three-month extension of border controls in the free-movement zone has confirmed that nothing has been resolved.

A summit of the Mediterranean countries, held in Lisbon less than a week before this one in Valletta, also highlighted persistent disagreements over the management of the Eurozone and German monetary rigor. So the EU doesn't need Donald Trump and his provocations to widen its differences. In interviews in mid-January, when he was still president-elect, Trump was already relishing the union's woes. He was open about his admiration for Brexit, describing it as "a great thing".

He fanned the embers by saying the EU was "basically, a vehicle for Germany", and went on to describe Chancellor Angela Merkel's welcome of migrants as a "one very catastrophic mistake". A week after Trump's inauguration, his decree closing the doors of the United States to nationals of

countries with a Muslim majority has aroused the indignation of the Old Continent. Except for the extreme right, which, through Marcel de Graaff, co-chair of the ENL populist group in the European Parliament, called on Tusk and the European Commission to "follow (Trump's) example and establish controls at national borders". Tusk underlined that "for the first time in history, in a world more multipolar than ever, so many people are becoming openly anti-European, or at best Eurosceptic". He insisted on the need for unity: "Only together can we be fully independent."

After his letter, the Tusk received the support of European Commissioner for Economic Affairs, Pierre Moscovici. The latter also called for a "closing of the ranks" because the EU is "targeted as a political and trading power". He added that "the 21st century can be European" provided that Europe remains "an open society and economy", which knows how to "build human and cultural bridges".

But the former Polish prime minister has come under attack from his own country. In Warsaw, the conservative government deemed his position on the new US administration "unnecessary and inappropriate". Will the prime minister of Malta, summit host Joseph Muscat, manage to sow harmony among all this discord? Yesterday morning he tried, calling on Europeans to be critical of the new US administration without letting that "translate into anti-Americanism".

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