

**Welcome speech at the
honorary doctorate ceremony for Donald Tusk
by the rector of TU Dortmund University,
Prof. Ursula Gather**

Thank you, Jona Kümper, for this wonderful piano piece by Frédéric Chopin - a perfect introduction to a very special day for our University, and also to a very special person.

Dear President Tusk,
Dear Professor Süßmuth,
Dear members and friends of TU Dortmund University,
Distinguished guests,

Today, we will confer an honorary doctorate on the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk. And it is not a coincidence that we have chosen the day of the 50th anniversary of our university for this ceremony; I will explain why in a few moments.

President Tusk, it is an exceptional honor for us that you have accepted the honorary degree, and it's a great pleasure to have you here today. Welcome to TU Dortmund University!

Ladies and gentlemen, let me share some background information about our laureate:

- Donald Tusk, born and raised in the city of Gdansk on the Baltic coast, studied history at Gdansk University and graduated in 1980.
- In that same year, he founded an Independent Students' Association, which was part of the 'Solidarity' movement, *Solidarność* [*Solidarnoschtsch*]. He became the leader of *Solidarność* at his workplace and was editor of one of Poland's major weekly newspapers published by *Solidarność* activists.
- In 2001, Donald Tusk co-founded "Civic Platform," a new centrist political party. It combined various political movements and brought together liberal and Christian-Democratic ideas. In 2003, he became its leader.
- Between 2007 and 2014, Donald Tusk served as Poland's Prime Minister. His government was the first and only one reelected in Poland, and his term as prime minister has been the longest in the political history of the country.
- In 2014, Donald Tusk resigned as Prime Minister to become President of the European Council – an office he still holds today.

That was a very short summary of our laureate's CV.

These few dates, offices and titles don't do justice to the immense and persistent commitment Donald Tusk has made to Europe - a commitment not only of a professional politician, but that of a convinced European.

Dear President Tusk, you are being honored today for your great achievements in and for Europe as well as your contributions to the normative debate about European values. We are also gathered here today to pay tribute to you as a great "European statesman," as Herman Van Rompuy of Belgium once called you, and to your academic and political merits.

Nevertheless, I would also like to recognize our laureate on a more personal level. With Donald Tusk, we welcome and honor a truly outstanding human being. I remember his acceptance speech very well, when he was awarded the Karlspreis in Aachen in 2010. He spoke about his childhood and young adulthood in Gdansk in a very moving way. He took us listeners by the hand and led us through the streets of his city, he let us experience the fear and the hope of his generation during the great strike at the Gdańsk shipyard and during the Solidarność movement for democracy. He shared his memories and his deepest convictions in an extraordinarily personal manner. And through this very personal and detailed description, he made us feel his love for his hometown, for his home country and for Europe.

Thus, Donald Tusk impresses us not only by his political actions and accomplishments, but also by passionately standing up for his beliefs and his politics.

It is today exactly 50 years ago that our university was founded. Together with our anniversary, we also celebrate academic freedom, striving for truth and knowledge and a shared sense of community. It was therefore our great wish to combine our jubilee with the awarding of an honorary doctorate to you, dear President Tusk. With this we want to emphasize, that as a university in the European tradition, we share the same fundamental values. And here, freedom is the most important one.

In one of your famous quotes, President Tusk, you mention that "Poland's only natural resource is freedom."

As you might know, here in the Ruhr area, we were dependent on coal for many decades. Nowadays, however, with the last coal mine in the area being shut down next week, freedom and in particular, academic freedom is also among our most important resources.

As rector of TU Dortmund University, I cannot stress enough that it is academic freedom, which made the concept of the European University so successful and persistent through more than 900 years of history. It is freedom and academic freedom which laid the foundation for our development and our European identity. Without this academic freedom, no university can exist.

Dear President Tusk, I am honored to welcome you here today and we are all looking forward to a wonderful ceremony. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Professor Rita Süßmuth, former President of the German Bundestag. You, dear Professor Süßmuth, will deliver the laudatio for Donald Tusk. The floor is yours.