**Time of hope for Europe**

Europe is facing an existential challenge of the coronavirus pandemic. The invisible enemy has broken through our defence lines, inflicting a cruel suffering first on northern Italy, then on all of your beautiful country, followed by Spain, and now the whole continent. The news from Italy fill with deep sorrow over each death, but they also give us hope that a better tomorrow can come.

Over a few weeks, Europe and Italy have changed forever. This year was not supposed to be like this. The year 2020 marks several anniversaries of great importance for Poland that we wanted to celebrate together. One of them is the 40th anniversary of the Solidarity trade union, a sweeping social movement against totalitarian, communist repression and social atomization. Solidarity received a lot of support from our Italian friends and its ideals gave millions of Poles strength to fight the Soviet empire of evil. This year also marks Saint John Paul II’s hundredth birthday. He showed the world what Christianity’s strength means at a time of a faith crisis. Our beloved pope, who came to be so dear to Italian people.

The lesson we learn from Poland’s history in the 20th century is that even in the darkest night, when two criminal totalitarian regimes wanted to destroy the biological substance of the Polish nation, we did not give up. Today, Poland is one of Europe’s fastest growing countries and an important ally within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The darkest hour is just before the dawn. We believe with all our heart that Italy soon will revive and again inspire Europe with its vast culture and economic success.

Polish-Italian friendship pervades our history. Poland would be a different country were it not for the heritage of Italy, which shaped our culture and art so profoundly. Our national anthem emphasizes the unique role of Italy as a place from where Poles could embark on the path to Polish independence.

In recent weeks, Poland made several friendly gestures towards Italy. Polish doctors set off to help Brescia, we handed over protective equipment, and we supported each other in helping our citizens return home. The time of evil is also the time of the birth of good. Europe has a responsibility to help Italy. Europe was born here in Italy. What would our continent be without Roman law, without the spiritual leadership of Rome, without the genius of Michelangelo? We can only pass this great exam as a community in solidarity. The current crisis has unexpectedly and profoundly affected the economic fabric that concerns entrepreneurs, employees, citizens, countries, and local governments. The ravages that have been made are like deep wounds that will be difficult to heal.

The European Union has capable instruments to fight the economic crisis. We need an ambitious EU budget, an ambitious cohesion policy, and the Common Agricultural Policy that will help rebuild the Union economically. We have to find new, fair sources of funding the EU budget originating from the sectors that take most advantage of the common market. We need brave measures to increase investments and improve the situation on the labour market across all 27 member states.

Today, half measures are no solution. Europe has to show its will to change by reducing the grey economy and fighting the VAT loophole. Tax havens cost EU member states about EUR 170 billion per year. Let’s say BASTA! We cannot let the weakest pay for the crisis, turning a blind eye to the wrongs of the mighty of this world.

In our Christian tradition, Easter is a time of hope when Jesus Christ conquered death after the brutal way of the cross. This event reflects the fate of our continent suffering from a devastating plague. We can conquer the coronavirus pandemic. Through solidarity. But you only win when you mount an offensive. It is time for a European offensive. For Italy. For the whole of Europe.