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'Trump Is a Problem for the Whole World' EU Parliament President

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Interview Conducted by Markus Becker, Florian Gathmann and Roland Nelles

With Europe falling ever-deeper into crisis, European Parliament President Martin Schulz is warning of the further advance of right-wing populism. In an interview, he also says he fears the possibility of a President Trump.

On Friday, leaders European Union member states will meet for their next informal meeting in Bratislava, Slovakia -- the second one without Britain. Also in attendance will be Martin Schulz,

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the German president of the European Parliament. Schulz is very concerned about the current state of the EU. "We're at a historical juncture: A growing number of people are declaring what has been achieved over the past decades in Europe to be wrong," the politician, a member of the center-left Social Democrats (SPD) told SPIEGEL ONLINE in an interview.

Schulz warns of the demons of Europe's past and says that the EU must now fight to keep them at bay. "I expect from the community of 27 a clear signal that we will stick together despite the problems and contentious issues," he says. "Just how important this cohesion is will become clear as soon as Brexit negotiations begin."

Schulz also expressed his fears of a possible US President Donald Trump. "Then you will have an obviously irresponsible man sitting in a position that requires the utmost sense of responsibility," he says. "Trump is not just a problem for the EU, but for the whole world."

Continue reading for the complete interview.

SPIEGEL ONLINE: Mr. Schulz, during our last interview at the beginning of the year, you said that things were going badly in Europe. What would your diagnosis be today?

Schulz: It has gotten even worse -- above all because of the Brexit decision. With Britain, Europe's second largest economy, a member of the G-7 and the UN Security Council, wants to leave the EU. That weakens us and it weakens Britain.

SPIEGEL ONLINE: That's not the EU's only problem.

Schulz: We continue to have major economic disparities in the Union, youth unemployment is far too high, there is only slow growth and necessary reforms have not been initiated. Then there is the renationalization strategy being pursued by the governments of Poland and Hungary. All of this threatens the future of the community. I am very concerned.

SPIEGEL ONLINE: You're not known for being a scaremonger.

Schulz: We're at a historical juncture: A growing number of people are declaring what has been achieved over the past decades in Europe to be wrong. They want to return to the nation-state. Sometimes there is even a blood and soil rhetoric that for me is starkly reminiscent of the interwar years of the past century, whose demons we are still all too familiar with. We brought these demons under control through European structures, but if we destroy those structures, the demons will return. We cannot allow this to happen. Just how important this cohesion is will become clear as soon as Brexit negotiations begin. As soon as the British have determined their strategy for the negotiations with the EU, we will be confronted with a united British position.

SPIEGEL ONLINE: What are your expectations for the summit in Bratislava?

Schulz: I expect a clear signal from the community of 27 that we will stick together despite the problems and contentious issues. Given the current situation, that alone would already be a

success. It cannot be met by an inconsistent EU, because there are surely people in London who would love to play us off against each other. That would be disastrous for the EU.

SPIEGEL ONLINE: Could the British be provided with access to the EU internal market without guaranteeing the right to the free movement of EU citizens?

Schulz: Certainly not. That is a red line for us in the European Parliament that is non-negotiable.

SPIEGEL ONLINE: The British still haven't invoked the official exit clause under Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty. When should this be filed by?

Schulz: The government in London apparently had no plan ready for an exit scenario -- it was taken by surprise. That's why I can understand that they need a little time to get themselves sorted. But I hope that the petition is submitted by the end of the year. Once it is, the two years of negotiations can begin. The people, but also the economy, the companies, need to be able to plan.

SPIEGEL ONLINE: In current discussions pertaining to the future of the EU, one issue is that of a possible joint European army. What are your thoughts on the issue?

Schulz: We surely need increased cooperation on both internal and foreign security. But a joint European army is a very far-reaching proposal and it would be difficult to implement. Such initiatives are nevertheless needed. Political leaders need to formulate long-term EU goals that show: Yes, we want to stay together.

SPIEGEL ONLINE: Yet the forces pulling Europe apart are powerful. Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn recently called for Hungary to be kicked out of the EU. Is he right?

Schulz: I have no regard for such formulations. Right now we need to keep this shop together and not launch new provocations, day in, day out. Still, I am also critical of the fact that Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is pulling out of everything -- the joint approach to the refugee issue, for example. He cannot disparage his colleagues in the EU either -- that's not how we treat each other. We require solidarity: in refugee policies, just as in the financial architecture of the structural funds from which countries like Hungary have strongly profited from for years.

SPIEGEL ONLINE: Does that mean that you want to exert financial pressure on countries like Hungary?

Schulz: You can't always be demanding solidarity from others and then refuse to show it yourself. The process of EU budget revisions will commence soon and there will also surely be a debate in parliament over whether the countries that have shown solidarity in the refugee crisis should be provided with greater financial support.

SPIEGEL ONLINE: It's not only in Europe that right-wing populists like the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party are on the rise. In the United States, a right-wing populist could even become president. What would it mean for the EU if Donald Trump landed in the White House?

Schulz: Trump is not just a problem for the EU, but for the whole world. When a man ends up in the White House who boasts about not having a clue and who says that specialist knowledge is elite nonsense, then a critical point has been reached. Then you will have an obviously irresponsible man sitting in a position that requires the utmost degree of responsibility. My worry is that he may inspire copycats, also in Europe. That's why I hope Hillary Clinton wins.

SPIEGEL ONLINE: Those are astoundingly clear words from a leading European politician. Even German Chancellor Angela Merkel has shied away from being so unambiguous.

Schulz: I say what I think about Trump.

SPIEGEL ONLINE: What will you do if Trump becomes president and then visits the EU?

Schulz: Then we will receive him just as we have every other US president.

SPIEGEL ONLINE: Your own future is wide open. You would like to continue in your role as president of the European Parliament, but according to EU tradition it would now be the turn of a member of the conservative family of parties. Are you counting on help from Chancellor Merkel, who clearly seems to appreciate you?

Schulz: I take note of the fact that there are a lot of people who appreciate what I do as parliament president, not just within my Social Democratic party group, but also among the conservatives. European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and many others, incidentally, would like to see me carry on. My term runs until Jan. 17, and I will continue to focus on the problems that need to be solved until then.