

Why is the EU isolated?

Mr Tusk's cry of desperation portrays an EU surrounded by hostile forces, and in danger of subversion from within. He sees Russia as an enemy of the EU. He condemns Islamic terrorism and is clearly worried about several states to the south across the Mediterranean. He dislikes the policy of the new President of the USA. He makes no secret of his worries about China. In other words, he sees the EU as a lonely group of states in a largely hostile world, where the world's three largest military powers are not in sympathy with the EU or are hostile to it.

What is his remedy? He wants the EU to arm itself and undertake more common defence, with increased defence spending. There is no mention of NATO, Europe's principal security guarantor. He wants to accelerate European union, to create a more cohesive force in the world with a united foreign policy.

He should ask himself how has the EU got itself into such an impasse with the world's great powers?

The EU has helped create the rift with Russia. The EU claims cause against Russia for Russia's illegal military intervention in Crimea. Russia points out the EU helped destabilise the elected President of Ukraine who was just about keeping Ukraine together, to back a new President with a pro EU agenda that the Russian speakers in the country did not support. At the very least we in the west must concede that the EU helped create the conditions for an opportunistic move into Crimea by Russia. Since then the EU has wished to keep up a tough rhetoric against Russia, and has imposed sanctions. I am no supporter of Russian aggression, but I do want the EU to recognise the need to live alongside Russia and to be careful about the interventions it makes in territories where Russia has influence. Working with Russia in the Middle East is now important given the position Russia has militarily and diplomatically in the region, as successive US Presidents have recognised.

The EU also needs to understand that the surest defence the EU has is from NATO, with the explicit military guarantee for all members.

The EU now seems to want to assert itself against China, though the cause and reason is less clear than with Russia. The EU regularly condemns Islamic terrorism, but is challenged when it comes to defining which rebels and forces on the ground in the complex Middle Eastern civil and religious wars qualify as terrorists and which can be defeated by EU action. In recent days the EU has been keen to indulge in a war of words against the new Trump Presidency, without listening to the concerns of the new Administration in Washington about trade, currencies and migration.

The overriding pessimism of Mr Tusk is sad to read. The lack of any positive forward looking agenda to engage with our ally the USA, or with the powers of China, Russia and the Middle East goes a long way to explaining the EU's loneliness. If all you offer is fear mixed with the odd threat it is not surprising the EU lacks friends. It was that combination which helped lose the EU one of its major financial contributors, the UK.