

Invitation letter by President Donald Tusk to the members of the European Council

It is fair to say that we will meet in a different political context from that of a few months ago, when the anti-EU forces were on the rise. The current developments on the continent seem to indicate that we are slowly turning the corner. In many of our countries, the political parties that have built their strength on anti-EU sentiments are beginning to diminish. We are witnessing the return of the EU rather as a solution, not a problem. Paradoxically, the tough challenges of the recent months have made us more united than before. But it is also thanks to your determination, that we have preserved this unity. I thank you for this, and I ask for more. Our unity is precisely the reason why we are in a much better place today, with the new-found optimism for the future.

However, we cannot be complacent or naïve. We have to prove to the people that we are capable of restoring control over events which overwhelm and sometimes even terrify. Last year we agreed that the EU will protect our people against security threats, illegal migration and uncontrolled globalisation, and we must continue to deliver. Therefore, during the upcoming European Council, I want us to move further on our policy response in these three areas.

Firstly, security. Terrorism remains a major threat. The recent attacks highlight the new wave of home-grown radicalisation. Let me be honest: the EU will not replace national states in this fight, because the policy response depends mainly on governments. But the EU can help to win this fight. So far we have made progress on foreign fighters and returnees. Now it is time to step up cooperation with the online industry. Terrorist propaganda makes its biggest impact within the first few hours of being posted. We should therefore encourage the industry to develop tools that will automatically detect and remove content that spreads terrorist material or incites to violence.

Given that Europe's security is our common responsibility, I would also like us to agree on the need to launch Permanent Structured Cooperation in defence. For it to succeed, we will need your ambitious commitments: from projects that develop our defence capabilities, to more demanding tasks such as military operations. Decisions in this respect will demonstrate not only our determination to invest more in Europe's security and defence, but also our responsibility for transatlantic relations, at a time when it is needed on our side of the Atlantic as never before. Every Member State should be invited to participate in the newly emerging defence cooperation and no-one should be excluded. This cooperation can be the best example that we are not promoting "different" speeds, but setting up a work method that should allow the whole EU to gain the "right" speed.

Secondly, on illegal migration, we need to review the situation on the Central Mediterranean route. The number of illegal arrivals of primarily economic migrants to Italy has increased by 26% compared to last year; around 1 900 people have lost their lives at sea, and the smuggling business is taking on a new dimension. Some operational results of our decisions have been achieved, namely the training of Libyan Navy Coastguards, the arrests of more than 100 smugglers and the neutralisation of more than 400 of their vessels. But this is clearly too little, and I don't see why we cannot bear greater financial responsibility for the functioning of the Libyan Navy Coastguards. They are our allies in the fight against smugglers. I am drawing your attention to this, because at the working level some of your representatives are not taking the necessary decisions in this regard.

Finally, on uncontrolled globalisation. In order to protect our free trade agenda at home, we must prove that we can defend Europe against those who want to abuse our openness. To that end, we must ensure that our Trade Defence Instruments are efficient. We need to have a serious debate on how to enhance reciprocity and screen investments from countries that impose unfair restrictions. People need to know that we can protect them from unfair trading practices.

As for the meeting agenda, we will start our proceedings with the traditional exchange of views with the European Parliament President Tajani, at 15.00 on Thursday. Following this exchange, Prime Minister Muscat will update us on where we stand in implementing our previous conclusions. Our first working session will be dedicated to internal security, counterterrorism and defence. After the adoption of our conclusions on these points, we will suspend our work to meet the press. We will reconvene for a working dinner dedicated to external relations. Chancellor Merkel and President Macron will first present the state of play as regards the implementation of the Minsk Agreements. Then I will share with you my reflections after the recent international summits and meetings, including with Presidents Trump and Erdoğan. In that context I would like us to recall that we stand united

behind the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. At the end of the dinner, Prime Minister May will inform us on her intentions as regards the negotiations on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union. After dinner, I will invite the 27 leaders to stay for a brief update on the negotiations, and to endorse the procedure for the relocation of the UK-based agencies.

On Friday, we will start at 10.00 with ECB President Draghi, who will present the current economic situation. Following that, we will move on to trade and adopt the relevant conclusions. We will then tackle conclusions on migration, where Prime Minister Muscat will inform us on the follow-up to the Malta Declaration. Before concluding, we will briefly turn to the concept of Digital Europe with Prime Minister Ratas, in view of the incoming Presidency's work programme. Our meeting should end around lunchtime. I look forward to seeing you all in Brussels.

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