

Address by President Donald Tusk to the European Parliament on the latest European Council of 15 October 2015

President, members of the European Parliament,

Before debriefing on the European Council of the 15th October and the next steps ahead, I would like to say the following:

The crisis, or rather challenge, that we, all of us, as a community, as the European Union, are facing now is perhaps the biggest challenge we have seen for decades. I have no doubt that this challenge has the potential to change the European Union we have built. It has the potential even to destroy achievements such as border-free travel between Schengen countries. And what is even more dangerous, it has the potential to create tectonic changes in the European political landscape. And these are not changes for the better. These are truly extraordinary times that require extraordinary measures, extraordinary sacrifices, and extraordinary solidarity. To me, as President of the European Council, and I believe to most of us, it is paramount to ensure the unity of our Member States and our European institutions. Together, we will handle this crisis. Otherwise, I do not want to think of the alternative.

From the very outset of this crisis, I have underlined the importance of protecting our external borders. We do not yet have an agreement on how to do it in operational terms but at least leaders share the view that our priority must be to protect the EU's external borders. Unfortunately, the situation will get even worse as I warned this chamber in my last intervention. I mean, for example, the new wave of refugees from Aleppo and the regions of Russian bombing attacks in Syria, which has created more than 100,000 new refugees.

Dear members,

During the last European Council, leaders gave a cautious welcome to the work of the European Commission on a deal with Turkey on migration. Here, let me personally thank Vice-President Timmermans who is working hard on the technical details. Let me stress again that a deal with Turkey only makes sense if it helps stem the migratory flows to Europe. This cooperation will not be easy. We should have no illusion than any third country, including Turkey, can replace us in protecting our borders.

Second, leaders took stock of work to make eleven 'hotspots' in Greece and Italy fully operational by the end of November. This deadline is ambitious and requires a significant acceleration of manpower and assets to Frontex, and the European Asylum Support Office (EASO). For now, the European agencies have less than half of what they need. When it comes to the role of hotspots, we have started an honest debate on how they should function. This is still a work in progress.

Third, we discussed at length how to protect our borders. We must end at once this completely unnecessary argument between the proponents of protecting external borders and the advocates of solidarity and openness. We need both. We need to restore effective external border control to start managing the situation on our borders. This has to include stopping the illegal crossings of our borders, registration of all asylum-seekers, and organisation of appropriate reception facilities. This will not in itself stop the flow. But it will reduce it significantly. In this regard, the European Council agreed that Frontex will be developed beyond its current mandate. It will be able to intervene in border crises faster and more assertively. And it will take a lead in the return of irregular migrants. We need the European Parliament's help to do this as quickly as possible. The aim is to equip Frontex with the tools it needs to fully protect European borders. I would like to commend the impressive work already done by the members on financing for both Frontex and EASO.

And in parallel, we will need to work on how to develop further our internal solidarity between Member States. A very first step is to provide Frontex and EASO with all the resources they need as well as implementing the temporary relocation mechanism to alleviate the burden from those of our Member States most affected.

Dear members,

This crisis does not just concern Syrian refugees. Two weeks from now, I will convene a summit of European and African leaders in Valletta. With the help of our African counterparts, it is our goal that this summit will help to forge a real Euro-African partnership on the migration issue.

The European Council decided that we want to achieve concrete operational measures, in a fair and balanced manner, on effective return and readmission, dismantling of criminal networks and prevention of illegal migration, accompanied by real efforts to tackle root causes and to support the African socio-economic -development together with a commitment concerning continued possibilities for legal migration.

We will aim at exploring possibilities for developing safe and sustainable reception capacities in the affected regions and providing lasting prospects and adequate procedures for refugees and their families, including through access to education and jobs, until return to their country of origin is possible.

Finally, we will ask Member States to further contribute to the efforts made to support UNHCR, the World Food Programme and other agencies, as well as to support the EU's Regional Trust Fund responding to the Syria crisis and the EU Trust Fund for Africa.

Dear President, dear members,

And finally on Britain: I briefed leaders on the preparatory discussions between my officials and the UK over the last months. We welcomed Prime Minister Cameron's commitment to set out the UK's specific concerns in writing by early November.

Thank you.

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