

Report and concluding remarks by President Donald Tusk to the European Parliament on European Council meetings of 17 and 18 October 2019

Please allow me to present my last report from the European Council. Let us focus on three matters.

Firstly, the European Council condemned Turkey's unilateral military action in North East Syria. No-one is fooled by the so-called ceasefire. Turkey needs to end its military action permanently, withdraw its forces and respect international humanitarian law. Any other course means unacceptable human suffering, a victory for Da'esh and a serious threat to European security. The European Council also reconfirmed its full solidarity with Cyprus, faced with Turkey's illegal drillings off its coast.

When it comes to Brexit, the European Council endorsed the deal reached by our negotiator and Prime Minister Johnson's government. As you know, it is based on the deal that we agreed with the previous government. The changes concern the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland, formerly known as the backstop. Prime Minister Johnson's acceptance to have customs checks at the points of entry into Northern Ireland will allow us to avoid border checks between Ireland and Northern Ireland, and will ensure the integrity of the Single Market. The revised deal was possible and acceptable to the EU because: firstly, it had the support of Ireland; secondly, it had the support of the European Commission, ensuring that all our negotiating objectives were met; and thirdly, because it avoids a chaotic no-deal Brexit.

On the Council side, we have just finalised the necessary steps for the EU's approval, and the legal texts are now with you. The European Parliament has a role to play, and it is an important one. The situation is quite complex following events over the weekend in the UK, and the British request for an extension of the Article 50 process. I am consulting the leaders on how to react, and will decide in the coming days. It is obvious that the result of these consultations will very much depend on what the British parliament decides, or doesn't decide. We should be ready for every scenario. But one thing must be clear: as I said to Prime Minister Johnson on Saturday, a no-deal Brexit will never be our decision.

Finally, the leaders held a difficult debate on enlargement. Following the clear recommendation by the Commission, an overwhelming majority of member states wanted to open accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania. Despite this, the required unanimity was not possible last week. In my opinion, this was a mistake, which I have said to the leaders (and I was a bit more direct than). Now I can only hope that the leaders draw the right conclusions, when they discuss the accession process before the Zagreb summit in May 2020.

Together with President-elect von der Leyen, the leaders also discussed the future of the European Union, in terms of its strategic agenda, the future EU budget and the incoming Commission's priorities. We are determined that the EU leads the way in fighting the climate crisis. A socially just transition to a green economy is not only a necessity, but it is an opportunity to improve our environment, while creating jobs.

As this is my last appearance here with Jean-Claude Juncker, I would like to express my greatest appreciation for him and his work. These were difficult five years for the Union, but we have always cooperated in good faith. Our respective roles and different perspectives sometimes meant political disagreements. But I can say without hesitation that Jean-Claude has always been devoted to Europe and served Europe well. And I am honoured to call you my friend. Thank you Jean-Claude.

I also want to thank the European Parliament for five years of good cooperation. It doesn't mean that we have always agreed. Quite the contrary. But I have always respected you knowing that we share the same goal: to protect our Union and our people. Thank you.

Closing remarks

Thank you for all your warm words about me. It was worth waiting 5 years for such a moment.

Thank you as well for your responsible position on Brexit and the extension. Through this, you showed common sense and the

sense of dignity. After what I have heard today in this chamber I have no doubt that we should treat the British request for extension in all seriousness.

Press office - General Secretariat of the Council

Rue de la Loi 175 - B-1048 BRUSSELS - Tel.: +32 (0)2 281 6319

press@consilium.europa.eu - www.consilium.europa.eu/press