

Report by President Donald Tusk to the European Parliament on the European Council meeting of 20-21 October 2016

The European Council last week had three main topics: Migration, trade and Russia including Russia's role in Syria.

On **migration**. For the first time for more than a year, the European Council was not a crisis meeting. The flows to the Greek islands are down by 98 per cent compared to this time last year. However, irregular flows on the Central Mediterranean route, that is from Africa to Italy, remain far too high and actually have not changed for the last two years. That is why we focused most of our discussion on the cooperation with Africa. Leaders heard a first assessment from the High Representative on efforts to control the flows in the Central Mediterranean in partnership with key countries. Good groundwork has been laid with Senegal, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Ethiopia on the so-called 'migration compacts'. Leaders will assess first results in December in terms of our goal, which is to prevent illegal migration to Italy and to the rest of Europe, and to ensure effective returns of irregular migrants.

Leaders also discussed getting back to Schengen. The goal continues to be lifting temporary border controls over time. However, it has to be accompanied by further reinforcement of the external borders. The Commission will continue assessing the situation and come forward with its recommendations on this basis.

The question of a reform of the Common European Asylum System was also discussed, including on how to apply the principles of solidarity and responsibility in the future. We agreed to consider concrete proposals by the Slovak presidency on this sensitive issue in December.

We also had a discussion about **Russia**. Leaders shared individual experiences of several countries ranging from disinformation campaigns, cyber attacks, interference in political processes in the EU, and elsewhere; to airspace violations and the fanning of community conflicts in Ukraine, the Balkans and further afield. Also the developments in the MH17 investigation raise troubling questions. Overall, we had a sober assessment of this reality, and no illusions. Increasing tensions with Russia is not our aim. We are simply reacting to steps taken by Russia, which is working with considerable energy and focus to weaken and divide the EU. Our long-term objective remains to find a *modus vivendi*. This means sticking to our values and interests, but also keeping the door open to dialogue. We all agreed that European unity in approaching Russia is our greatest strength. And so we will stand united.

We also discussed **Syria**. We condemn the attacks by the Syrian regime and its allies, notably Russia, on civilians in Aleppo. The EU is calling for an end to the atrocities and an immediate cessation of hostilities. We asked the High Representative to pursue further diplomatic and humanitarian efforts. If these atrocities continue, all available options will be considered. The Syrian people need an immediate and permanent ceasefire and the re-opening of humanitarian aid corridors.

The last issue we discussed was **trade**. Our citizens are increasingly concerned about whether the trade deals we negotiate are in their best interests. And I am afraid that we won't be able to continue to negotiate Free Trade Agreements if we do not prove that we are very serious about protecting European consumers, workers and companies. And when we discussed it, we drew a big red line between protection and protectionism. In this spirit, leaders committed to reaching an urgent agreement on the modernisation of all the EU's trade defence instruments. I know that this Parliament is ready to support this. We have now tasked our trade ministers with breaking the deadlock.

When it comes to **CETA**, the EU is still not ready to sign the agreement with Canada. But talks continue in Belgium, also this morning. I thank all those who have helped facilitate these talks; especially Martin Schulz and Jean-Claude Juncker, you have showed a genuine leadership and responsibility. Thank you very much for your help. But at the end of the day, only the Belgians can decide on Belgium's position. I am impressed by the determination and engagement they have shown during the last hours. I still hope that Belgium will prove that it is a consensus-building champion and that we will be able to finalise this agreement soon. Here I must also express my gratitude to the Canadian side for their cooperation and perseverance. If we cannot make the case for free trade with a country like Canada - the most European country outside Europe and a close friend and ally - there are obvious consequences for Europe's global position. But it is too early to go there yet. As we speak, the summit tomorrow is still possible.

On the Ukraine Association Agreement and DCFTA, the Dutch Prime Minister informed the European Council about the difficulties in ratifying the agreement. Prime Minister Rutte promised to use the next few days to try to work out a solution with the Dutch parliament to address these difficulties. Whatever the outcome of the debate in the Netherlands is going to be, it is clear that we need to find a way-ahead that is also agreeable to the other 27 Member States and to Ukraine.

Let me also report that we were glad to welcome Prime Minister May at the European Council. She confirmed that the United Kingdom will invoke Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty before the end of March next year. Consistent with our policy of no negotiations without notification, we did not discuss Brexit. However, given PM May's confirmation that Article 50 will be triggered, let me recall the EU27 position of 29 June. We want as close relations as possible with the U.K. There must be a balance between rights and obligations. And the UK can continue enjoying access to the Single Market but it requires accepting all four freedoms.

To conclude, let me recall the meeting of the 27 EU leaders that was held in September in Bratislava. We met informally to discuss the future of Europe in light of the UK referendum on Brexit. As also reflected in the Bratislava Roadmap, the summit set out a number of actions to address the main concerns of Europeans: migration, security both internal and external, and economic anxieties. It is now for Member States and the EU institutions to implement the road map, and as a matter of fact we already started to do so. On 5 October, the EU ratified the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. The next day, the European Border and Coast Guard was launched in record time. Here I want to thank the European Parliament for its excellent and swift cooperation. And last week the Bulgarian Prime Minister Borissov thanked his colleagues for the support to help protect the borders with Turkey, as decided in Bratislava. Thank you.

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