



European Council
The President

Brussels, 16 March 2016

Dear colleagues,

Our European Council Thursday and Friday, including our meeting with Turkey's Prime Minister, will just like 10 days ago be dominated by the migration crisis.

When we met on the 7th of March, we received the new proposal from Turkey on how to further strengthen our cooperation too late to allow for a common decision. Instead you mandated me to prepare an agreement on the basis of a number of principles outlined in our statement. The objective is clear: an agreement acceptable to all 28 Member States as well as to our Turkish partners. Work is progressing but there is still a lot to do.

I have asked my staff to present a first full draft for a joint EU-Turkey Statement to your ambassadors today to move forward in our discussions on how we can address the concerns raised in our meeting last week. The catalogue of issues to be resolved before we can conclude an agreement is long. An absolute priority is to ensure that our decisions respect both EU and international law. We also have to look into how to prevent new sea or land routes for irregular migration opening from Turkey to the EU. And we have to be ready to assist Greece with the practical implementation of the new return mechanism, via the European Asylum Support Office and if necessary via direct assistance from Member States.

Another priority is to see how we can speed up the disbursement of the initial €3 billions to Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey as well as to discuss modalities for voluntary resettlement.

To prepare our meeting, I held intensive talks in Nicosia and Ankara yesterday. When it comes to the accession process, my conviction is that we need to find a way of using the process of reenergising EU-Turkey relations, which goes far beyond migration, so that this process also becomes an opportunity to support the settlement talks in Cyprus. Only if this is possible, can we move forward here.

Let me conclude with a few remarks on the running order. On Thursday, we will start at 16h00 with the traditional exchange of views with the President of the European Parliament followed by the family photo. Our afternoon working session will, as usual in the Spring, begin with a discussion of the economic situation, the implementation of structural reforms undertaken by Member States and the setting of priorities for the next cycle of the European Semester. The President of the European Central Bank will join us for that discussion. We will adopt the conclusions on this part of our agenda at the end of the discussion. I would also like to use this working session to agree our conclusions on climate change and energy security.

Over our working dinner, we will hold a comprehensive debate on migration and EU-Turkey relations. Beyond agreeing a common position on an EU-Turkey agreement, we also need to take stock of the situation along the Western Balkans route after our common decision to end the irregular flows last week as well as our effort to massively step up humanitarian support, not least to Greece. On Friday morning, EU Heads of State or Government will reconvene at 10h00 for a breakfast meeting with Prime Minister Davutoğlu with a view to adopting the EU-Turkey Statement. That meeting should conclude our proceedings.

I look forward to seeing you in Brussels tomorrow.



D. TUSK