



European Council
The President

Brussels, 17 October 2017

Dear colleagues,

Let me share with you some remarks before our European Council meeting this Thursday and Friday.

October European Council schedule

After our traditional exchange of views with European Parliament President Tajani at 15.00, Prime Minister Ratas will update us on where we stand in terms of implementing our previous conclusions. We will then have a political discussion on the external aspects of migration, with a specific focus on the financial needs necessary to stem the flow of illegal migrants from Africa. Next, we will adopt conclusions on the vision for Digital Europe, with the objective of turning the fruitful discussions at our recent Tallinn summit into operational follow-up. Our conclusions on security and defence should ensure that the momentum from last June is maintained, in particular as regards the efforts to launch the Permanent Structured Cooperation by the end of the year. Over dinner, we will look into the deeply worrying developments in DPRK, the situation as regards Iran as well as Turkey. Furthermore, President Macron will make a point about trade negotiations, and Prime Minister May will share her reflections about the current state of the Brexit talks.

On Friday morning we will have an informal breakfast about the Leaders' Agenda. After that, the European Council will reconvene at 27 to discuss the way ahead in the negotiations on the withdrawal of the UK. Prime Minister Ratas will take this opportunity to inform us on the discussions in the Council on the relocation of the UK-based agencies. Our meeting should end around lunchtime.

Leaders' Agenda

At our meeting in Tallinn we agreed to develop a Leaders' Agenda for the coming two years. I have discussed it with all of you, and would like to set out how I propose to proceed.

Based on my consultations, it is clear that, while delivering on what we agreed in Bratislava and Rome, there is also a willingness to reinvigorate and enrich our work, including by drawing on new ideas. In doing so, I would like us to be guided by three principles.

Firstly, we should focus on practical solutions to EU citizens' real problems. This means changes – not just for the sake of change, but in order to bring back a sense of stability, security and predictability in people's lives as well as faith in the future. Institutional innovation can in some cases be a means to an end, but we should be careful not to get bogged down in unnecessary institutional or theoretical debates.

Secondly, we should proceed step by step. Some matters are ripe for decisions now, and should therefore be dealt with straightaway, with speed, ambition and determination, so as to ensure real progress. Other matters will need to be further prepared, before we can debate them.

Thirdly, we should preserve the unity that we have managed to develop over the past year. We need this unity in order to solve the migration crisis, to tackle unfair aspects of globalisation, to deal with aggressive third countries, to limit the damage caused by Brexit as well as to preserve the rules-based international order in these difficult times. We can only confront today's uncertainties if we act in unison, since individual countries are too small to cope with them on their own. Some might say that I am obsessed with unity, but I am deeply convinced – not only because of my job, but above all due to my personal experience – that European unity is our greatest strength.

Obviously there is the dilemma of how to reconcile unity with dynamism, and how to use the new energy in a way that does not divide, but strengthens us. After the consultations, I feel reassured that we are capable of accelerating our work, without disrupting our unity. Therefore, the overall framework for our decisions should continue to be in meetings with 27 or 28 Member States, depending on the subject. As we set out in the Rome Declaration, this approach does not prevent Member States moving forward more rapidly in specific areas, in accordance with the Treaties, while keeping the door open for those who want to join later. To be clear, unity cannot become an excuse for stagnation, but at the same time ambition cannot lead to divisions.

Methods

When it comes to working methods, I have three suggestions to make.

First of all, I am very happy with your willingness to accelerate our work and overcome the sense of powerlessness, where political interests, or bureaucratic inertia, stand in the way of achieving results. For this to succeed, I will propose a more political approach during our discussions, and – whenever necessary – more meetings. Engaging more directly on politically sensitive issues, and ensuring real progress, will require that you are ready to overcome deadlocks in the Council of Ministers. We have previously demonstrated our capacity to do so, for example with regard to more robust anti-dumping rules that have now also been agreed with the European Parliament. With this in mind I will propose a number of debates to cut the Gordian knot on the most sensitive issues such as migration or EMU reform.

As you know, there are two main reasons why some issues are stuck. The first is that instead of dealing with the issues at stake, leaders allow them to get lost somewhere between their collaborators or in the decision-making system. I am really pleased that you agreed in Tallinn that it is high time to take things into our own hands. The second reason is conflicts of interests and opinions among you and among your governments, both when it comes to substance and the determination to break the impasse. In order to move forward and agree on quick solutions we need a new method, which does not involve long drafting sessions on our conclusions. That is why I would like to propose a method that focuses on solving real issues. It will involve a number of discussions, as indicated in the Leaders' Agenda, that will be organised on the basis of *Decision Notes* which I will put forward before these discussions, starting with our meeting in Gothenburg. These *Decision Notes* will report on our differences, precisely describing the scope of conflict and thus allowing us to hold a serious, political discussion. The aim will be to break any deadlock. If the first discussion does not succeed, we will need to decide whether to make another attempt at solving the issue, or if the only way forward is enhanced cooperation among the willing countries, as provided for by the Treaties.

Secondly, many of you insist on a rigorous follow-up of our meetings to ensure that decisions are properly implemented. In Bratislava we agreed to intensify our focus on implementation by deciding that the Head of State or Government representing the Presidency would report on progress at every ordinary meeting of the European Council. I suggest to develop this practice by ensuring that the reports are clearer and provide a better basis for us to draw political conclusions for our work. With this in mind, I enclose an overview of the implementation of the Bratislava Agenda. As we are currently halfway through the delivery on our ambitions from Bratislava, I have designed the Leaders' Agenda in such a way that, without overlapping with our previous agenda, it complements what we have already decided to do together.

Finally, several of you have rightly highlighted the need to ensure that decisions among us are firmly anchored in your respective national political settings. Each of you are used to getting involved with your national parliaments and reaching out to the public at large, in accordance with your specific constitutional traditions and political circumstances. We will not change that. However, we could also draw inspiration from new ideas on how to debate Europe, such as those expressed recently.

With a view to achieving our common objectives, I suggest that we organise our work in accordance with the Leaders' Agenda, attached herewith. This is of course a living document that will have to be updated and enriched as we go along. I would very much welcome your comments and suggestions at our upcoming discussion on Friday morning. I do not, however, foresee a drafting session on the Leaders' Agenda, but rather a political exchange on how to best prepare our works in the months ahead. Depending on the outcome of our discussion I will ensure that it is revised in accordance with our common understanding of the way forward.

I look forward to seeing you all in Brussels.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Donald Tusk', written in a cursive style.

D. TUSK