



European Council

The President

Brussels, 4 March 2016

Dear colleagues,

To prepare for our meeting on Monday with Prime Minister Davutoglu on EU-Turkey cooperation and our internal meeting afterwards, this week I travelled to Vienna, Ljubljana, Zagreb, Skopje, Athens, Ankara, Istanbul and Belgrade in order to continue to build a European consensus on migration. Let me share with you some results and thoughts from my trip, which could serve as a basis for our work.

First, we need to get back to Schengen. The countries of the Western Balkans route, also those outside the EU, are all ready and determined to return to the full application of our common rules and decisions, including the Schengen Borders Code. This will mean an end to the so-called wave-through policy of migrants. It will not solve the crisis but it is a necessary pre-condition for a European consensus. On Monday, we should all confirm this approach. With that we will close the Western Balkans route, which was the main entry point for migrants with 880.000 entering in 2015 alone and 128.000 in the first two months of this year.

Second, we need to move forward in our cooperation with Turkey, on migration and beyond. Our summit last November reinvigorated our cooperation in many areas such as accession and visa liberalisation processes as well as our energy and economic dialogues. In my meeting with Prime Minister Davutoglu in Ankara on Thursday, we agreed that there is good progress to report on a number of actions in our EU-Turkey Action Plan but that the number of illegal entries from Turkey to Greece remains far too high. We both believe that we can reduce the flow through large-scale and rapid return from Greece of all migrants not in need of international protection. The political will is there but it poses a logistical challenge, in which we have to support Greece. Prime Minister Davutoglu also confirmed Turkey's readiness to take back all migrants apprehended in Turkish waters. On Monday, I would like us, together with Prime Minister Davutoglu, to discuss our cooperation on migration and beyond and endorse the concrete steps to implement our action plan.

Third, we need to scale up our humanitarian assistance, in particular in Greece. As our colleague, Prime Minister Tsipras, has said, we must not allow Greece to become "a warehouse of souls". On Monday, I would like us to agree that all available EU tools, including accelerated relocation, should be used to address the humanitarian consequences for the refugees, not least in Greece, in a speedy and effective way. This also includes the European Commission's proposal of a new Emergency Assistance instrument of euro 700 million, recognising the role of national governments in these humanitarian efforts.

In practical terms, our meeting with Prime Minister Davutoglu will begin at 12h30 with a lunch of the Heads of State or Government. Following this and after a short break for a press point with Prime Minister Davutoglu, we will resume at 28 for a working session, during which we should agree a joint statement on getting back to Schengen and the humanitarian dimension.

Let me conclude on a prudent positive note. For the first time since the beginning of the migration crisis, I can see a European consensus emerging. It is a consensus around a comprehensive strategy that, if loyally implemented, can help stem the flows and tackle the crisis.

I look forward to seeing you in Brussels on Monday.

Yours sincerely,



D. TUSK