

## **Remarks by President Donald Tusk after his meeting with President of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Gjorge Ivanov**

Thank you, President Ivanov for welcoming me to Skopje today. I am glad we had this occasion to talk openly about the challenges facing the region, as well as our common future. And I look forward to continuing our talks after this press point.

I understand now is not an easy time and that you have great responsibility to provide leadership. These times require nothing less than statesmanship.

In 2015, you were in the frontline of the crisis, facing an unprecedented inflow of migrants and refugees coming from Turkey through Greece. You are best placed above all to say how important it was to close the Western Balkan route and to regain control of the borders and as a result, the stability in the region. We have developed a comprehensive strategy to tackle migration crisis and today, the Western Balkans route remains practically closed. Also thanks to your efforts.

We want to make sure that this mutually beneficial cooperation continues in the future. We will therefore stand ready to respond to your needs on the ground, be it humanitarian support to local communities, or in the form of equipment or manpower, including through the EU Border and Coast Guard.

I came here with a strong message from the EU leaders and institutions: The European Union's commitment to your European perspective is unequivocal. Working towards EU and NATO memberships has consistently proved a factor of unity. Unity that is so needed in your country today. I therefore hope that you will continue to follow this internal compass and avoid anything that could further fuel tensions, also along ethnic lines.

Finally, President Ivanov, I replied to your letter in early March on finding a way out of the current political crisis. This protracted crisis is holding your country back from your Euro-Atlantic path. It is for you to find a solution based on democratic principles, decency and common sense. Only such a solution can be a lasting one. When you find it, you can count on our support.