

Remarks by President Donald Tusk after his meeting with Prime Minister Miro Cerar in Ljubljana

Good morning. Before anything else, let me thank Prime Minister Cerar not only for the warm welcome, once again, here in Slovenia, but, more importantly, for being such a constructive and important partner and friend. A little more than a year ago, at the peak of the migration crisis, your personal engagement was key in finding the solution. And now again, I seek your advice and experience. I would also like to congratulate you on the effective economic policy.

Yesterday and today we discussed many topics.

First on migration. Since I last visited your country, we have made visible progress. From the start of the crisis, I shared your views and had no doubt that the key to its resolution was, and is, the effective control of the EU's external borders. Obviously, an essential precondition for achieving this goal has been close cooperation with our partners in the Balkans and Turkey. That was the main reason for my many visits to and consultations with this region in the last two years.

Today, thanks to our common efforts, we have almost stopped illegal migration through the Western Balkans route. The number of arrivals from Turkey to the EU remains low. In fact, with a reduction of 98%, the route has virtually been closed. We have effectively managed to end the 'wave-through approach' and regain control of our external borders. But I am aware that to keep the situation under control requires our constant vigilance and efforts.

This is also why we discussed today how we can further improve the effectiveness of our actions. We need to keep the Western Balkan route closed for good. And we need to achieve the same result on the Central Mediterranean route.

Given the positive evolution of the situation, I understand your reluctance to the decision to maintain, even temporarily, internal controls at your Schengen border. I can assure you, that we are exploring all ways to return to a normally functioning Schengen area at the earliest possible date. And I cannot even imagine anyone wanting to keep internal border control, if we have real, effective control of our external borders.

We also discussed the political situation in the Western Balkans. Slovenia enjoys excellent relations with the region's countries and has always been a strong advocate of their 'European perspective'. For me, there is no doubt that the future of the Western Balkans is with the European Union. The EU remains firmly committed to the enlargement policy for the region as was confirmed by the EU leaders during last European Council in March. After our talks today, I am convinced that Slovenia and its Prime Minister will continue to play an important part in coordinating our action in the region, to help create more stability and prosperity.

Finally on Brexit. Once again, I want to thank Slovenia for its constructive, positive position, also on this file. In Brexit talks, as on all other issues, our most important asset is the unity of our Member States. After the first feedback I got on my draft Brexit guidelines, I have no doubt that the day of the first Brexit summit, 29 April, will be a show of unity.

And thank you very much, Miro, for yesterday's walk in Ljubljana. I will always remember what you told me at the monument of your great poet France Prešeren. That the first sentence of your national anthem, written by him, should be a motto for the entire European community today:

Žive naj vsi narodi,
ki hrepene dočakat dan,
da, koder sonce hodi,
prepir iz sveta bo
pregnan!^[1]

Hvala lepa. Thank you.

[1] God's blessing on all nations,
Who long and work for that bright day,

When o'er earth's habitations
No war, no strife shall hold its sway;

(Official translation by Janko Lavrin)

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