

Remarks by President Donald Tusk on the European Council meeting of 9 March 2017

Good evening. The first thing I want to say is that I am really grateful for the trust the European Council have placed in me. But now is not a time for self-congratulation of course. I can only state that I will continue to work for a better and more united Europe with all Member States, without exception.

Today, leaders discussed the European economy with the President of the European Central Bank. Things are getting better, and they are getting better in every Member State of the Union. This proves that our economic strategies are on the right track. Job creation is and will remain our priority, as the best means to tackle inequality and expose the myths of the populists.

Leaders confirmed the EU's unequivocal position on trade. Europe remains the champion of open, rules-based trade. Not least due to signs of protectionism emerging elsewhere. Trade is central to our economic success and so we will swiftly advance ongoing negotiations - such as with Japan. At the same time we will not hesitate to defend ourselves against unfair trading practices, wherever necessary. We want to set the global standard for free and fair trade.

This evening leaders will address the situation in the Western Balkans, a region which is vital for Europe. Tensions and divisions have got out of hand, partly because of unhealthy external influences, which have been destabilising several countries for some time. I will propose to leaders that we take action, including in our strategic communications. To the countries of the region, our message will be clear: "the European Union remains faithful to the promise of Thessaloniki and fully committed to the stability and prosperity of the region". I want leaders to reconfirm the European perspective for the Western Balkans.

Over dinner, we will also review progress made in the area of security and defence cooperation, where the leaders gave a new impetus last December as a strategic priority.

Tomorrow as you know, the EU27 will meet to discuss the future of the Union, in the context of the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome on the 25 of March.