



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL
THE PRESIDENT**



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Remarks by President Herman Van Rompuy following the European Council

All of Europe has been shocked by the events off the coast of Lampedusa earlier this month. The European Council is united in expressing its deep sadness at the dramatic death of hundreds of people in the Mediterranean. Leaders all agree determined action should be taken in order to prevent the loss of lives at sea and to avoid that such tragedies happen again.

Confronted with such suffering, we are all upset. Yet we also know migration flows are complex phenomena. So our action will be guided by three principles, three values: prevention, protection, and solidarity.

We want to continue to address the root causes of illegal migration flows – working with countries of origin and transit. This includes EU development support and a wider political dialogue with third countries. We want to step up the fight against trafficking and smuggling of human beings – on our own territories and in countries of origin and transit. In these preventive efforts we will cooperate with the relevant international organisations, in particular the UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration.

As regards protecting lives, we call for swift implementations by the Member States of the new European border surveillance system Eurosur. It will help detect vessels and protect and save lives. Just last night, in Italy alone – while we were meeting here –, there were at least six rescue operations that saved over 700 lives. We also call for reinforcing the presence and activities of our joint border agency Frontex in the Mediterranean.

P R E S S

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Beyond this, we all agree it's urgent to examine what more can be done. And that's why we ask the newly established Task Force for the Mediterranean (led by the European Commission, with member states, our diplomatic service and agencies) to come up quickly with concrete operational proposals for a more efficient use of European policies and tools. We will return to asylum and migration in December precisely with operational conclusions. Next June, we will have a longer-term reflection on these policies, during our wider strategic debate on upcoming legislative and operational work in the field of freedom, security and justice.

The three principles, three values, which we stressed together today – prevention, protection, solidarity – will guide all this work. All leaders agree to shared responsibility with the Member States most affected by migration flows.

We also prepared the Vilnius summit with our six Eastern partners, which will take place five weeks from now. We hope to take important, even historic steps, in particular with Ukraine, provided there is determined action and tangible progress. That Association Agreement will be a test for the Eastern Partnership as a whole. The Ukrainian leadership knows what has to be done. We are also ready to initial similar agreements with the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, which could then be signed next autumn, in 2014

This morning we also continued last night's discussion on economic policies. Yesterday we looked at how to improve the competitiveness and resilience of our economies, focusing on the digital market and on the banking union. This morning we pursued the work on growth and on jobs. There are four points I'd like to highlight.

First: our commitment to combat youth unemployment, with the Youth Employment Initiative that must be fully operational from January. Last year, EU funds helped 800.000 young people enter the working place. From next year, with the national youth guarantees, we're set to do even more. It will require a very serious effort on all sides – and I hope next month's Youth Employment Conference in Paris will give an extra push.

Second: our support to small and medium sized enterprises in getting access to credit. SMEs are by far the biggest employers in Europe and many have been hard-hit by the crisis. Concretely, we decided to significantly increase the funding from the EU budget that helps them access lending to fund their projects and investments, up from the current €12 billion, to invest in the form for instance of loans or loan-guarantees. We really insisted this money must be leveraged, and fast, so that every euro invested can result in up to 5 or 6 euro of new loans for SMEs.

Third point, also particularly relevant for SMEs: we called for maximum simplicity and minimum hassle for businesses, by cutting down paperwork and simplifying EU law where needed. The Commission has already identified new steps to make the EU regulatory framework lighter and fit for purpose, and we all agreed it's important to move forward rapidly.

Fourth point: we stay focused on increasing growth opportunities for businesses across Europe and in the world.

We need more trade, here we welcomed the recent agreement with Canada, and we need a better single market: for the digital economy, as we discussed last night, and also for services. Member states are committed to opening up their services market further, and the European Council is keeping up the pressure on this.

So with these points we had a good discussion this morning on competitiveness, on the fitness of our economies, and we will continue that work in December, when the banking union and defence, defence industry, will be our biggest priorities.
