



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL  
THE PRESIDENT**



Vilnius, 29 November 2013  
EUCO 253/13

PRESSE 525  
PR PCE 227

**Opening remarks by President of the European Council  
Herman Van Rompuy  
at the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius**

Allow me to welcome you to this third summit of the Eastern Partnership. I would also like to express my gratitude to our host for all the work undertaken in preparing the summit, and for her own very warm welcome. We are writing history. Thank you, Dalia. I am glad to see such a high level of participation from all. This sends a very strong message about our commitment to the Eastern Partnership.

When we embarked upon this journey four years ago, we started with a vision: to bring the relationship between the European Union and its Eastern European partners to a new level: to deepen our bilateral engagement and build a strong platform for cooperation and dialogue. In order to advance our cooperation in the Eastern Partnership, it is important to remember and acknowledge the interests and goals that bind us together.

We share a genuine interest in coming closer. Our chief objective is to build a common area of shared democracy, prosperity, stability and increased relations and exchanges. To ensure stability and prosperity on the European continent, we need to reinforce cooperation. Resolving potential conflicts, building trust and nurturing good neighbourly relations: all of this is essential to economic and social development.

**P R E S S**

---

Dirk De Backer - Spokesperson of the President - ☎ +32 (0)2 281 9768 - +32 (0)497 59 99 19  
Preben Aamann - Deputy Spokesperson of the President - ☎ +32 (0)2 281 2060 - +32 (0)476 85 05 43  
[press.president@consilium.europa.eu](mailto:press.president@consilium.europa.eu) <http://www.european-council.europa.eu/the-president>

EUCO 253/13

1  
**EN**

Member States of the European Union have become privileged destinations for many of your citizens travelling abroad for studies, pleasure or business. Over two million Schengen visas were issued in 2012 in your countries. Ukraine was the biggest country with over 1 million visas. It is positive that we are making progress in bringing our citizens closer. In this regard the young generation is important. Our current Erasmus Mundus programme for higher education plays a key role. I am glad that we can now launch the new "Erasmus +" programme, with the aim to increase the participation of higher education institutions and students from partner countries.

Our economies are strongly linked: a third both of your exports and of your imports are with the European Union and a big share of foreign direct investment in the Eastern partnership countries comes from EU companies. But there is a lot of untapped potential which should be capitalised. More economic integration between us, a better overall business climate would significantly contribute to our common competitiveness and generate more growth.

Our cooperation on energy also plays an important role. Together we aim to increase mutual energy security by developing further networks and gradual integration with the European Union's internal energy market. A key development is the Southern Gas Corridor.

Together with some of our partners, we are taking today a leap forward, towards political association and economic integration. I would like to congratulate again Georgia and the Republic of Moldova on finalising the negotiations on the most far-reaching Agreements the European Union has entered into: Association Agreements including Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas. At the same time, we should not forget the other Agreements that have also been signed here: the Visa Facilitation Agreement with Azerbaijan and the Framework Agreement for participation in EU-led crisis management operations with Georgia.

For Georgia and Moldova, today is an historic opportunity. After three years of intensive negotiations these countries are coming closer to the European Union through political association and economic integration. Congratulations on this achievement. Much work now remains to be done to enable us to sign these agreements as soon as possible. For these partners, the key task now is implementation.

With Azerbaijan, we are advancing on the establishment of a Strategic Modernisation Partnership as a complement to an Association Agreement. We look forward to signing the Readmission Agreement and the Mobility Partnership in the very near future.

We welcome Armenia's declared wish to take forward the relations with the European Union in all possible areas without prejudice to commitments under the Customs Union. Both of us acknowledge the importance of the work carried out in almost four years of negotiations and the positive impact that these negotiations have had. We will reflect jointly on a possible way forward for our relations.

Ukraine has decided to suspend the process of preparation for signature of the Association Agreement and DCFTA. We remain convinced that the agreement is the most ambitious one that the European Union has ever offered a non-Member State. The European Union's position remains clear. The offer to sign an unprecedented Association Agreement and DCFTA is still on the table. We believe that the agreement is in the long-term interest of the Ukrainian people.

Our relations with Belarus continue to be far below their potential. There are significant possibilities available in order to develop our relations once the political circumstances are in place.

On the multilateral level, much has happened during the last four years. We have intensified our exchanges, developed sector cooperation and ensured our stakeholders play a central role in our relations. This dimension, which is often underestimated, is an essential component of the Partnership. It is there that cooperation amongst partners flourishes, that important exchanges occur and that the spirit of joint ownership takes root.

We are conscious of the fact that, in addition to the reforms our partners have been undertaking the last few months, they have also been faced with unacceptable internal and external pressures. The European Union has been very clear in its support for its Eastern partners. It has recalled the fundamental right of each country freely to determine its foreign policy and its trade policy, as enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act. That makes us different from others. We respect each other.

Having said this, further progress in certain areas will of course depend on the overall state of relations. The Eastern Partnership is not only a matter of choice, it is a matter of necessity. We share a geographical and economic space. Only by working closely together, understanding our respective sensitivities and constraints, can we serve the interests of our citizens. Let us never forget why we are working on all this. We have the long term interest of our people in mind, of our people in Europe and close to Europe.

---