



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL
THE PRESIDENT**



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PRESSE 38
PR PCE 21

**Remarks by President of the European Council
Herman Van Rompuy
following the 32nd EU-Russia Summit**

Let me start by reiterating my welcome to President Putin to Brussels for the 32nd EU-Russia Summit and express my appreciation for a productive encounter. We had a frank and far reaching discussion focused on the fundamentals of our strategic partnership and the direction in which we want to take it. We acknowledged the many common interests that should help us drive our relationship forward.

We addressed openly the convergences, and divergences, regarding relations with our common neighbours. We discussed how the Eastern Partnership and the Customs Union initiative could relate to each other

On our side, I underlined in particular the benefits of the Eastern Partnership for all our Eastern neighbours including Russia. A more stable economic and institutional environment, improved market access and intensified trade relations will strengthen demand and create new business opportunities for all. Russian companies are well placed to benefit from these new opportunities. I made it clear that the Eastern Partnership does not affect Russia's economic, trade, social, human and cultural links to many of our common neighbours. These links will not be put at risk, but on the contrary, stimulated by more dynamic and successful economic development in the partner countries.

There can be different interpretations and misunderstandings on the association agreements and that is why we both agreed to pursue bilateral consultations at experts level on the Eastern Partnership Association Agreement and the economic consequences on both sides.

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 <http://www.european-council.europa.eu/the-president>

EUCO 27/14

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As a concrete and telling example of the huge potential for all, I will repeat what I said last Saturday in Warsaw. In 1990 the prosperity levels were the same in Poland and Ukraine. Today, Poland is three times more prosperous than Ukraine. And here I am only talking of the economic dimension.

Association agreements, including free trade agreements, between the EU and partners like Moldova, Georgia or Ukraine are fully compatible with Russia's existing trade arrangements with these countries. The trade agreements can interact constructively with the Customs Union as long as WTO rules are applied and free decision-making is guaranteed. We expect that the decisions which Moldova and Georgia have made in Vilnius will be confirmed with the signature of these agreements by early autumn at the latest.

The European Union is closely following the developments in Ukraine and strongly condemns violence. We call for restraint. Those responsible have to be held to account. We want the fundamental freedoms - such as freedom of expression and of assembly - preserved. The present stalemate must be rapidly overcome through a genuine dialogue between the authorities, the opposition and civil society. The Ukrainian authorities have a special responsibility in this. It is crucial to find a way forward in the interest of the Ukrainian people. EU High Representative will be travelling to Kiev in a few hours.

For our part, we are ready to move ahead and to sign and implement our association agreement, already initialled a year ago, provided the authorities confirm their adherence to a democratic Ukraine. The respect for sovereign countries' freedom of choice on foreign policy, regional economic cooperation and trade is a fundamental right and a principle I stressed today once again.

Our cooperation with Russia on global questions spans a wide range. We work together effectively on issues like Afghanistan, the Middle East Peace Process and anti-piracy off the Horn of Africa. We are willing to deepen and strengthen this cooperation to our mutual benefit. The latest very significant developments regarding Syria and Iran offer new possibilities to further develop our joint action.

Another common challenge is international terrorism. We have today adopted a [Joint Statement on Combatting Terrorism](#). In it we reiterated our firm commitment to cooperate in addressing the threat of terrorism, based on respect of rule of law and of human rights.

More broadly speaking, clear and reliable understanding on fundamental freedoms, human rights, and rule of law will help advance further our strategic partnership and strengthen our economic ties. It will contribute greatly to the development of a reliable, stable business environment and investment climate.

Finally, I thank President Putin for the open and frank exchange we have had on all these issues. I trust that the European Union and Russia will continue working on this basis during the coming months and that we will be able to register further progress in our relations on the occasion of our next summit in June in Sochi. At that time we hope that sufficient progress to re-launch the negotiations on a new agreement will be ready, a new agreement covering all aspects of our cooperation. Finally, I express my best wishes for successful winter Olympics in Sochi.