



European Council
The President

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STATEMENT
EUCO 3/15
PRESSE 3
PR PCE 3
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Press statement by European Council President Donald Tusk after his meeting with Prime minister of Latvia Laimdota Straujuma

Let me start by thanking Prime Minister Straujuma for the warm welcome I have received here in beautiful Riga and the good meeting we just had. Likewise, I look forward to meeting President Berzins after this.

Before anything else, first a word on the barbaric attacks in Paris. Terror has struck in Europe. It is, sadly, not the first time. Madrid, London, and other such dramatic events, demonstrate the vulnerability of nations in today's world.

The European Union cannot do everything - but it can contribute to strengthening our security. In reaction to 9/11, the EU developed the European Arrest Warrant. But we need to do more.

Next week in Strasbourg I will appeal to the European Parliament to speed up work on the EU Passenger Name Record system, which can help in detecting the travel of dangerous people. This can be our common initiative.

And, having spoken to President Hollande yesterday evening, I intend to use the meeting of Heads of State and Government on 12 February to discuss more broadly the response the EU can bring to these challenges.

Let me now turn to the reason for being here in Riga today. Latvia has assumed the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union. The Council presidency is important, it is a privilege and it is a challenge - and a lot of hard work. All at the same time. I know this from my own experience as Prime Minister in 2011 during the Polish presidency of the Council. I am confident that you are well prepared and capable. You can count on my full support; just as I count on yours.

Your presidency starts at a difficult time with serious internal and external challenges to be addressed during the next six months.

One such challenge is in our eastern neighbourhood. Last year armed conflict returned to the European continent. Territorial integrity and sovereignty must remain the indisputable principles upon which the post-war security of Europe is built. The EU must remain united in the defence of solidarity, freedom and democracy. In this context, our review of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the European Partnership Summit here in Riga in May will be important milestones. Latvia is ideally placed to deal with our relations with Russia and our eastern neighbours. In fact, Latvia has - in a responsible way - already contributed a lot to the EU policy towards the East.

Let me be clear. The EU does not have a policy against Russia. We have a policy that is aimed at ensuring the respect of peace and borders in Europe. It is a policy that requires and will continue to require sacrifices. Often the price to pay is higher in countries like Latvia. But there is no way around it. The EU will stay the course because fundamental values and European security are at stake. EU leaders reaffirmed this determination at our December European Council three weeks ago.

Another key challenge will be to finally put the economic and financial crisis behind us. Investment, structural reforms and sound public finances are our strategy to do so. In our rule-based framework, it is essential that all countries live up to their responsibilities. In many ways, Latvia provides inspiration for how to do so and overcome a crisis. Latvia proved that structural reforms for more employment and growth pay off and can be implemented. And in the midst of the euro crisis, Latvia took the brave and forward-looking decision to join the euro area.

In the next six months, we will need to progress further on the Economic and Monetary Union, to improve how it works. For this we need closer coordination of economic policies, as the level of interdependence between euro countries has become crystal clear during the crisis. We will have an opportunity to discuss this in more detail at the upcoming informal European Council in February.

Other key priorities of your presidency are the Digital Single Market and the Energy Union. I hope ministers can make good progress here. On my side, I will put these topics on the leaders' agenda at the March and June European Councils. And I will involve the Latvian presidency very closely in the preparations of these upcoming summits.

Prime Minister, dear Laimdota, I am confident that under your leadership and that of your ministers, the Latvian presidency of the Council of the European Union will be engaged, energetic and efficient.

Thank you, honestly.
