

Invitation letter by President Donald Tusk to the members of the European Council

We will meet later this week to discuss three major issues, namely **migration, trade and Russia**.

As regards **migration**, we are slowly turning the corner. Our actions are best seen on the Eastern Mediterranean route, where we observed a 98% drop in the influx of irregular migrants between September of last year and this year. The European institutions have increased their efforts in helping third countries to take their citizens back. By June this year, Frontex had already returned twice as many irregular migrants as in the whole of 2015. Additionally, the EU has recently concluded an agreement with Afghanistan, which allows for more efficient cooperation on migration.

On the Central Mediterranean route, arrivals are at the same level as in 2014 and 2015. That is why at our October meeting we should focus more particularly on the work done with countries of origin and transit in Africa. The President of the European Commission and the High Representative will present where we are in implementing an effective Partnership Framework of cooperation with individual countries, the so-called 'migration compacts'.

As for our **trade policy**, at the European Council we have a special responsibility regarding the agreement with Canada. There is still work to be done, but I hope we will find a way forward.

Trade is a powerful engine for jobs, growth and better living standards. Yet the benefits of trade are being questioned. I am convinced that together we can deliver a trade policy that is fit for today's concerns and tomorrow's challenges. But ultimately it hinges on our ability to adequately protect ourselves, and our citizens, when unfair practices arise. Because for trade to be free, it needs to be fair. The European Council will therefore discuss the modernisation of trade defence instruments and our ongoing negotiations of free trade agreements with key partners.

Over dinner we will have a strategic discussion about **Russia**. The objective is to address our overall, long-term relations with this important neighbour. Looking ahead to the decisions we will need to take in December, our main asset in dealing with Russia remains our unity. To date, regardless of our differences, we have always managed to remain united. And we must stay this course.

In the same context we should also discuss the dramatic developments in Syria. The High Representative will present the outcome of the Council's discussions, and we will adopt conclusions.

Let me conclude by saying that a lot has happened since we last met at the June European Council. 27 Member States have initiated work on a common future and outlined a Bratislava roadmap, which helps guide the works of the institutions. The best way to prove the relevance of the European project is to deliver on the concrete issues which matter most to our citizens.

As for the **proceedings**, we will start on Thursday at 16.00 with a traditional exchange of views with the President of the European Parliament, followed by the family photo. At our afternoon working session Robert Fico, as Prime Minister of the rotating Presidency, will present the implementation of the work carried out by the Council, followed by a discussion on migration. Over dinner we will have a broad debate about Russia. The Prime Minister of the Netherlands will inform us about the ratification process of the AA/DCFTA with Ukraine. We will adopt conclusions on Syria. The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom will present the current state of affairs in the country. Finally, I will outline my suggestions for improving our working methods. I hope to get your agreement to start applying them as of our December meeting, including by starting the European Councils much earlier. We will conclude on Friday with a discussion on trade and the adoption of remaining conclusions. I look forward to seeing you in Brussels.

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