

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

We will meet on Thursday against the background of refugee pressure that has been increasing in recent months. We agreed in September that our priority should be strengthening of the EU's external borders, as well as increasing our support for the countries in the neighbourhood and the refugees there.

Our natural reaction was to seek solutions to the refugee crisis, not only internally, but also by addressing the root causes through cooperation with the countries of origin and transit. As a result, the EU has engaged in an intensive dialogue with Turkish leaders as the biggest transit country. The goal of my talks in Ankara was to stem the wave of refugees to Europe. An agreement with Turkey makes sense if it effectively reduces the inflow of refugees. Concessions will only be justified when this goal is achieved.

We can already make the first assessment of our actions. One thing is beyond any dispute. The situation in the region is difficult and politically very complex. Just to give one example, Turkey is calling on us to support the establishment of a safe zone in northern Syria, whereas Russia - increasingly engaged in Syria - is openly rejecting this idea. There is no doubt that our strengthened cooperation with the region is indispensable, but it will be a long march. I propose that we discuss our common approach to Turkey and Syria over dinner.

Even if the influx of refugees slows down during winter, we must be ready for spring and the threat of bigger waves flowing to Europe. In fact, all the leaders I met in the region spoke about millions of potential new refugees. As exaggerated as this opinion may sound, it is our obligation to be prepared for all scenarios. We must ask ourselves if the decisions we have taken so far, and the ones we are going to take on Thursday, are sufficient to contain a new migratory wave. We need to face real challenges and answer serious questions concerning our methods of action.

Let us be clear about one thing. The exceptionally easy access to Europe is one of the main pull factors. In this context we should consider:

1. The future of the Dublin system, which is now in force - whether to keep it as it is or to look for alternatives;
2. The specific role of hotspots in light of different opinions as to their character and purpose;
3. The strengthening of our external borders, including a possible EU border guard.

As regards the organization of the Summit, the President of the European Parliament will join us at the beginning of our meeting at 4pm. After the exchange we will start our first session in order to discuss migration and to finalise conclusions. During this session, we will also take stock of the next steps with regard to the UK referendum on its membership of the EU, and confirm our commitment towards seeking viable solutions. President Hollande will raise the issue of the Paris COP 21 preparations with a view to making it a European and global success. Then, we will also review the work on the report on the future of the EMU.

We will continue over dinner with the international aspects of the migratory crisis which I have listed above. Finally, we will have a brief update on the most recent meeting of the Normandy Format. I look forward to seeing you all in Brussels