

Remarks by President Donald Tusk after the 5th Eastern Partnership summit

We have just concluded the fifth Eastern Partnership Summit.

It is only eight years ago that we launched the Eastern Partnership at a summit in Prague. I remember it well, because as the then Prime Minister of Poland I was one of the initiators. The reason for launching it was simple: we wanted to bring our European neighbours from the East closer to the EU. This required a more strategic and comprehensive approach towards the region, which had become the EU's immediate neighbourhood after the 2004 and 2007 enlargements. And we did this with a new ambitious offer of political and economic integration.

I believe we can be proud of our achievements. Today we have Association Agreements with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, which include the most important areas of cooperation, from trade to visa-free travel. The EU is today the first export and import market for Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova, and the second biggest market for Armenia and Belarus, and a major investor in each of them. Our achievements are bringing our people, businesses and countries closer together in a very concrete way. In short, we are reuniting Europe step by step.

Later today, we will be signing an ambitious new Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement with Armenia, while negotiations on a new agreement with Azerbaijan are ongoing. We are also developing our relations with Belarus.

When it comes to our future, we agreed on new political and economic objectives that we want to reach by 2020. We want to reinforce Eastern Partnership cooperation in a number of specific areas such as small and medium-sized enterprises, digital economy, broadband investments, and investments in transport, energy and infrastructure projects. The list is long.

But above all, we want to strengthen links between our citizens and give more support to civil society. In the coming years we will offer greater opportunities for youth to participate in exchange programmes and traineeships in EU countries. We want more students and academic staff to benefit from the Erasmus-plus programme.

But while there are indeed good prospects for the future, frozen and armed conflicts continue to prevent development and create hardships in Eastern Partnership countries. The death of five Ukrainian servicemen yesterday is just the latest proof of the tragic consequences of Russia's aggression in Ukraine. The EU condemns Russia's aggression and will never recognise the illegal annexation of Crimea.

There should be no doubt that our common future lies in the EU's readiness to open up EU policies for our partners. And I can reconfirm that we are ready to do that. It is also the sovereign right of each of our European neighbours from the East to choose the level of ambition, and the goals they aspire to, in their relations with the EU. And for me the key sentence of the Association Agreements still is the one which says that "the European Union acknowledges the European aspirations" of its associated countries, that is Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, and "welcomes their European choice". And all choices remain open. I personally believe that the European aspirations expressed by some of our Partners are the best chance to achieve success for their societies as well as for the stability and prosperity of Europe as a whole.

Today we have adopted a joint declaration, which is, as always, a compromise. I would prefer that the wording of the declaration were more ambitious. But we all decided that the demonstration of our unity is the most important objective. This unity is best expressed in one paragraph of today's declaration:

"The Summit participants recommit themselves to strengthening democracy, rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as principles and norms of international law, which are at the heart of the Eastern Partnership. The European Union remains committed in its support to the territorial integrity, independence, and sovereignty of all its partners."

To sum up, we can be satisfied with the results so far. And be hopeful for the future. Thank you.

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