

Remarks by President Donald Tusk after his meeting with President of Cyprus Nicos Anastasiades

Good morning. First of all, let me thank you, Mister President, dear Nicos, for receiving me once again here in Nicosia in such a warm and hospitable way. In the last five years as President of the European Council, I have been here many times to try to find – with you - solutions to some of our common problems. And also to underline EU solidarity; solidarity for all its members, big and small. Today is no exception.

We are of course all overwhelmed by the latest developments in Syria but let me start with the reason why I came here today. I came to demonstrate our full solidarity with you in the face of Turkey's continued drilling activities in the waters off the coast of Cyprus. The European Council has strongly condemned these illegal actions. And in light of the new drilling activities by Turkey since the end of last week, I reconfirm that the EU stands united behind you. I call on Turkey to end these activities as they do not only undermine the recent efforts to resume Cyprus settlement talks but they also undermine good neighbourly relations between the EU as a whole and Turkey.

We also discussed the issue that is in the centre of attention of the whole world: the dramatic situation in Syria. Turkey's unilateral military operation in northern Syria is of grave concern and should stop. Turkey's security concerns should be addressed through political and diplomatic means; a military intervention will only make matters worse. Instead of creating stability, it will create even more instability in the whole region, exacerbate civilian suffering, cause further displacement and threaten progress achieved by the Global Coalition against Da'esh. The Kurdish forces that have been part of the Syrian Democratic Forces have been and are crucial in fighting Da'esh. For both sides of the Atlantic, abandoning them is not only a bad idea, as President Trump said, but raises many questions, both of strategic and moral nature.

Turkey must understand that our main concern is that their actions may lead to another humanitarian catastrophe, which would be unacceptable. Nor will we ever accept that refugees are weaponised and used to blackmail us. That is why I consider yesterday's threats made by President Erdogan totally out of place.

Let me conclude with Brexit. Prime Minister Johnson promised the EU to come forward with a solution that would work for all. A solution that would not only satisfy the hardcore brexiteers, but also solve our well known and legitimate objectives: to avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland, to protect the Good Friday Agreement and to ensure the integrity of the Single Market.

Unfortunately, we are still in a situation in which the UK has not come forward with a workable, realistic proposal.

A week ago I told PM Johnson that if there was no such proposal by today, I would announce publicly that there are no more chances – because of objective reasons - for a deal during the incoming European Council.

However, yesterday when the Irish Taoiseach and the UK Prime Minister met they both saw - for the first time - a pathway to a deal. I have received promising signals from the Taoiseach that a deal is still possible. Technical talks are taking place in Brussels as we speak. Of course, there is no guarantee of success and the time is practically up. But even the slightest chance must be used. A no deal Brexit will never be the choice of the EU. Thank you.

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