

## Remarks by President Charles Michel after his meeting with Prime Minister of Slovakia Peter Pellegrini

It's a great pleasure for me to be in your country, to be here. It is my first visit this year. It is important for me to have again the occasion to discuss with you, to listen actively to you, to your country, because it's very important, in my opinion, to guarantee the European unity and to take into consideration the different concerns of the different countries and to be aware of the different challenges you face, and you will face in the future. And indeed, together at the European level, we face many difficult, sensitive challenges.

First of all, we will have in the next two weeks, in the next months, to find an agreement regarding the next European budget. It will be a very important political moment at European level because this budget is not only a technical discussion. It is a political discussion. And we need to find ways for a good compromise. And I understand very well, we discussed it this evening, and we will continue the discussion that for your country is very important, to guarantee the possibility to support all the positive efforts in order to make progress. I know that you made progress. I know, for example, that the region of Bratislava is very high at the level of the growth if we compare with the average European level.

I also understand very well that the regional disparities in your country, they are very sensitive and an important concern for you personally, for your Country's development. It's important that the European budget take into consideration this reality.

I know that this discussion will be difficult, will be complex, because we face a Brexit gap. It is a consequence of the British decision. And you have to find the right balance between the classical policies, agriculture provision on the one hand, and the new challenges we have to face like migration, innovation or climate change. For example, the European budget – an important topic, important discussion and is very important for me to listen actively to you and understand different positions at the European level in order to be able, in the next two weeks together make progress at European level, point one.

Point two – climate change. Climate change is a very important topic. It's a very important challenge for the world, for the European Union also. And I would like to thank you, Peter, you personally, because you and your country played an important role at the European level in order to make this agreement possible.

In December, a few weeks ago, we took a very important decision. We gave a very strong signal, a very strong message to the rest of European Union, but also to the world. And we consider, indeed, that this difficult challenge can

be an opportunity for more innovation, for more growth, for more technical development. It's very important for us to take into consideration the different starting points of different countries. To respect also the sovereignty of different member states regarding their energy mix. But at the same time, it's very important to try to make progress together and to be able to guarantee the competitiveness at the European level, to guarantee the growth, to guarantee more jobs. But at the same time, to win the battle against this climate change topic.

Another important topic you have to discuss in the next week, and we'll continue the discussion we started a few months ago – the enlargement process. I share this opinion, it's very important to give a clear message, a clear position – we need more security, more stability in the world in general, but also in our neighbourhood. And it's why we need to discuss between the leaders the possibility to modernize the enlargement process on the one hand. And how is it possible, to give with unanimity, a clear signal to different countries like Albania, or like Northern Macedonia, and we will try in the next weeks to continue discussions in order to be able to express a common European position. It's very important for our future.

Another important topic, of course, is the possibility and necessity, in my opinion, for the European Union to play a stronger role at the international level. We have many tools. We are 500 million citizens. We are a strong economic power. Strong democracies. We have values that we have to promote, that we have to defend. We have interests, that we have to promote and that we have to defend. And that's why with all my colleagues at the Council, I consider we have to try to be more coherent at the international level and especially in these current circumstances. The situation in the Middle East, for example, Iran, Libya is very important, to be very clear. To call for de-escalation; and to consider that we have to play a positive, constructive role. Based on this strong conviction, I will be present Saturday in Turkey in order to meet President Erdoğan. I will be also present in Egypt on Saturday evening in order to meet with President al-Sissi because I think that the European Union has something to say, something to promote. It's very important for the stability, for the predictability. Also, it's not my opinion to consider that the European Union will be out of the game. We have to be in the game and to promote and defend our interests.

I would like again to thank you personally, Peter, because we had many occasions in the European Council to work closely together. Thank you for this strong, positive and constructive cooperation. Thank you for the important role you play in the European Council. Thank you also for the personal relationship and friendship. And I know that we can count in the future on strong cooperation between your country, you personally and the European Council.