

Remarks by President Donald Tusk after his meeting with Prime Minister of Albania Edi Rama

Good afternoon. Let me thank you, Prime Minister Rama, dear friend, dear Edi, for your warm welcome. I am always happy to return here. Let me also thank you for the great honour of receiving the *Benemerenti* medal. You told me I deserve this medal for my support for the European integration process of Albania. I am very proud to receive this distinction, but the greatest award for me would be the opening of accession negotiations with Albania.

When I visited Tirana April last year, I spoke of my dream for your country and the entire region to follow the same path as my country, Poland, towards the EU. Today, one year on, I can say that, thanks to your efforts, we have come closer to that goal. No one should have the slightest doubt about this. Here in Tirana as well as in all EU capitals.

In June, the European Union's Heads of State or Government committed to deliver a "clear and substantive" decision on whether to open accession talks with you and your neighbour, North Macedonia, in October this year.

We are coming closer to this moment. I have always thought that the EU should open accession talks with both Albania and North Macedonia, in line with the positive recommendations from the Commission. I have not changed my mind. Your country must be treated with equal respect and on its own merits, just like all other countries in the region that share your goal of becoming EU members one day.

In our meeting today, we also discussed the importance of your country maintaining a solid track record as regards the rule of law and the fight against corruption and organised crime. The EU's obsession with the rule of law – and I would add with "reconciliation" and good neighbourly relations – is part of our DNA and will not go away when you become members. Otherwise, the European project would stand on shaky grounds.

But equally important is that Albania's and the region's accession to the EU is in the best interest of the whole of Europe. Because there will be no stable and safe Europe without the integration of all the Balkans in the EU. What is at stake is our common future. And no one is doing anyone any favours here. Thank you.