

Remarks by President Donald Tusk after his meeting with the members of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina

Press contacts

Preben Aamann

European Council President Spokesperson

+32 2 281 51 50

+32 476 85 05 43

Good afternoon. Let me start by thanking you for your hospitality. There is something special about being back in Sarajevo. A city so rooted in European history, so beautiful and always welcoming. This time I am here to prepare for the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Sofia on 17 May. But today we also talked about Bosnia and Herzegovina and EU integration.

Let me start by making three points about the Sofia summit:

First, our summit should reaffirm the European perspective of the whole region. The European Union is and remains the most reliable partner for the Western Balkans. As by far the biggest investor, the biggest donor and the biggest trading partner for the whole region. This is also the case for your country. For example, more than 70% of your exports go to the European Union. And more important than trade, is our political partnership and shared values of democracy, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law.

Secondly, the summit will aim to improve connections with and within the region – human, digital or infrastructure connections. In other words, we want to further connect the Balkans and the EU through concrete projects like roads and roaming. A good example of this is the signature today of a European Investment Bank loan worth 150 million Euro for two segments of the Corridor 5C pan-European highway, connecting Zenica with Mostar. One day this will be part of the transport arteries of a re-united Europe, helping to connect Mediterranean regions with Central European regions including my native Poland.

My third point is that we need to work together more closely to tackle common security challenges. Balkan security is European security. For both sides it is essential to invest even more in fighting trafficking and migrant smuggling, weapons and drugs smuggling, organised crime and terrorism. We will also discuss this at our summit in Sofia.

Let me now turn more specifically to Bosnia and Herzegovina. There is a lot of good will on the EU side. We stand ready to continue delivering on our promises. And to assist you in your efforts. But as friends we are also obliged to tell you what concerns us. One such issue is definitely the

stalled electoral reform. The EU is ready to contribute to the successful resolution of the current impasse, which ultimately would be in the best interest of your country.

To conclude let me say that European history teaches us that inter-ethnic and inter-religious tensions bring only pain and tragedy. But European history and the history of the European Union also teach us that reconciliation is indeed possible, even between sworn enemies during centuries. And that the result of reconciliation and cooperation is peace, prosperity and, in fact, a better life for everybody. As most Europeans, we all have different identities inside of us. These identities must live side by side, complement and reinforce each other. Thank you.

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