

Remarks by President Donald Tusk after the European Council meetings on 13 December 2018

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I will start with Brexit. Today Prime Minister May informed the leaders about the difficulties with ratifying the deal in London and asked for further assurances that would, in her view, unlock the ratification process in the House of Commons. After discussing the Prime Minister's intervention among 27 leaders, and bearing in mind our full respect for the parliamentary process in the United Kingdom, we have agreed the following:

"1. The European Council reconfirms its conclusions of 25 November 2018, in which it endorsed the Withdrawal Agreement and approved the Political Declaration. The Union stands by this agreement and intends to proceed with its ratification. It is not open for renegotiation.

2. The European Council reiterates that it wishes to establish as close as possible a partnership with the United Kingdom in the future. It stands ready to embark on preparations immediately after signature of the Withdrawal Agreement to ensure that negotiations can start as soon as possible after the UK's withdrawal.

3. The European Council underlines that the backstop is intended as an insurance policy to prevent a hard border on the island of Ireland and ensure the integrity of the Single Market. It is the Union's firm determination to work speedily on a subsequent agreement that establishes by 31 December 2020 alternative arrangements, so that the backstop will not need to be triggered.

4. The European Council also underlines that, if the backstop were nevertheless to be triggered, it would apply temporarily, unless and until it is superseded by a subsequent agreement that ensures that a hard border is avoided. In such a case, the Union would use its best endeavours to negotiate and conclude expeditiously a subsequent agreement that would replace the backstop, and would expect the same of the United Kingdom, so that the backstop would only be in place for as long as strictly necessary.

5. The European Council calls for work on preparedness at all levels for the consequences of the United Kingdom's withdrawal to be intensified, taking into account all possible outcomes."

On foreign policy, we discussed the recent escalation in the Sea of Azov. The European Council is united in the conviction that there is no justification

for the use of military force by Russia. Therefore, we request the immediate release of all detained Ukrainian seamen. Russia must not limit the freedom of navigation through the Kerch Strait. While the EU continues to follow developments in the Sea of Azov, we will provide additional assistance to the affected regions.

This evening, Chancellor Merkel and President Macron also presented the state of implementation of the Minsk Agreements, and we decided to renew our economic sanctions against Russia, given that no progress has been made. We also discussed the ongoing preparations for the first EU-League of Arab States summit, to take place next February in Egypt.

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