

Remarks by President Donald Tusk ahead of the EU-Western Balkans summit and the Leaders' agenda dinner

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We are ahead of a summit during which EU leaders will discuss innovation, European future for Western Balkans, and the response to President Trump's policies on trade and Iran.

Starting with our dinner tonight, we will have a debate on innovation and the digital economy. Europe is lagging behind other major economies in terms of innovation. Innovation is set to impact our lives at an ever-growing pace over the coming years, raising not only hopes but also ethical questions. Europe needs to play an active part in this transformation, as it will be the reality of all Europeans. That is why tonight, I will ask EU leaders two questions: *What do they want to do at the EU level to boost breakthrough innovation? And: How do they want the EU become a major player in big data?*

Following last week's announcement of the United States withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran, we need a united European front. I want leaders to reconfirm that the EU sticks to the deal as long as Iran does. The deal is good for European and global security, which is why we must maintain it. Despite the US hesitation. We will also look at options for the EU to protect European companies from negative consequences of the US decision. And I want the European Commission to be given a green light, so that it is ready to act whenever European interests are affected. We should also seek ways, together with other partners, to address very real concerns over Iran's ballistic missile programme and its regional activities.

Trade is another topic for tonight's discussion. We will decide on the best way forward in EU-US trade relations. Here again, unity is our greatest strength. And my objective is simple: we stick to our guns. This means a permanent exemption from US tariffs on aluminium and steel if we are to discuss possible trade liberalisation with the US. The EU and US are friends and partners, therefore US tariffs cannot be justified on the basis of national security. It is absurd to even think that the EU could be a threat to the US. We need to bring back reality in this discussion, which is not the case today.

Tomorrow, we will meet our Western Balkan partners collectively for the first

time in fifteen years. It will be an opportunity for both sides to reaffirm that the European perspective remains the Western Balkans' geostrategic choice. Beyond the longer-term outlook, we want to demonstrate that we care about socio-economic development in the region here and now. Investing in infrastructural and human connections with and within the Western Balkans is in the EU's best interest. And it will be the objective of our summit. I hope to bring our Western Balkan friends closer to the EU.

Everything we are going to discuss today and tomorrow, has a global dimension. I have no doubt that in the new global game, Europe will either be one of the major players, or a pawn. This is the only real alternative. In order to be the subject and not the object of global politics, Europe must be united economically, politically and also militarily like never before. To put it simply: either we are together, or we will not be at all.

Besides traditional political challenges such as the rise of China, or the aggressive stance of Russia, we are witnessing today a new phenomenon: the capricious assertiveness of the American administration. Looking at the latest decisions of President Trump someone could even think: with friends like that who needs enemies. But frankly speaking, Europe should be grateful to President Trump. Because thanks to him we have got rid of all illusions. He has made us realise that if you need a helping hand, you will find one at the end of your arm. Europe must do everything in its power to protect, in spite of today's mood, the transatlantic bond. But at the same time we must be prepared for those scenarios, where we will have to act on our own. We have enough potential to rise to the challenge. But what we need is more political unity and determination. There is no single objective reason why Europe should have any complexes about anyone else. Being a European is a reason to be proud. We have a right and an obligation to hold our heads up high, both when with our enemies and when with our friends. And this is what, in some sense, our summit will be about.

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