

Remarks by President Donald Tusk following the EU-Turkey leaders' meeting in Varna

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Let me first of all thank Prime Minister Borissov for hosting us . Today's EU-Turkey meeting reaffirms the importance both sides give to our relationship.

At our meeting in Brussels last year we agreed to intensify our dialogue at different levels. Since then a number of high level meetings have taken place between the EU and Turkey. This evening we took stock of where things stand and set out some parameters for the future.

On migration and support for refugees, the EU and Turkey remain very close partners. I would like to express our appreciation for the impressive work Turkey has been doing, and to sincerely thank Turkey and the Turkish people for hosting more than 3 million Syrian refugees these past years. The EU has lent substantial support to improve the livelihood of these refugees, and this evening we reaffirmed the European Union's unwavering commitment to continue this support.

As an EU candidate country, Turkey has committed to developing and upholding the highest standards of democracy. We understand Turkey's need to deal effectively with its security after the attempted coup and the terrorist attacks it has suffered. But we are concerned that some of the methods used, undermine fundamental freedoms and the rule of law in Turkey. We encourage Turkey to work with the Council of Europe, of which Turkey has been a member longer than most EU Member States. The EU also stands ready to assist.

Good bilateral relations with EU Member States are also an important commitment within the accession process. We welcome positive progress in recent months with some of our Member States, but still have serious concerns about inter alia recent Turkish actions in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea as well as the detention of EU citizens. The European Union stands united behind the Republic of Cyprus regarding its right to explore and exploit its natural resources in its Exclusive Economic Zone. This is also important in view of our shared objective for the successful reunification of Cyprus for the benefit of both populations on the island, for Turkey, the European Union and for EU-Turkey relations.

We also had a discussion this evening on working together in the field of counter-terrorism. We want to expand our cooperation with regard to Foreign Terrorist Fighters; another area where we share important security interests.

We also expressed our concern with Turkey's actions in Syria, in particular the situation in Afrin. Escalating violence and displacement in an already tragic and volatile situation must be avoided. And we recalled Turkey's responsibility to ensure the protection of civilians and the delivery of humanitarian assistance to all those in need.

Let me end by thanking President Erdoğan for coming to Varna. Our meeting today demonstrated that while our relationship is going through difficult times, in areas where we do cooperate, we cooperate well. We reconfirm our readiness to keep up the dialogue and consultations and to work together to overcome current difficulties with a view to unleashing the potential of our partnership. I remain fully committed to assisting in this process. Thank you!

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