

STATEMENTS AND REMARKS166/18
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Remarks by President Donald Tusk after the European Council meetings on 22 and 23 March 2018

We have just concluded a very intensive and productive summit, where we addressed a number of specific global economic and political risks, including those related to the actions of Presidents Trump, Putin, Erdoğan, and Brexit negotiations.

First, leaders expressed full solidarity with the United Kingdom, condemning the nerve agent attack in Salisbury. The European Union agrees with the UK Government's assessment that it is highly likely that the Russian Federation is responsible for this attack, and that there is no other plausible explanation. Already today, the EU ambassador to Moscow has been recalled to Brussels for consultations. Additional steps are expected as early as Monday, at the national level. In these difficult circumstances I am personally especially pleased that despite the tough Brexit negotiations, the European Union has demonstrated unanimous and unequivocal unity with the UK in the face of this attack.

Leaders also discussed Turkey in view of our Monday meeting with President Erdoğan. In this context, the European Council strongly condemned Turkey's continued illegal actions in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea. This issue will be raised in Varna, where we hope to have a wide-ranging discussion on EU-Turkey relations and on the way ahead. I am aware that it will not be an easy meeting. The EU is concerned not just with the situation in Eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean. Certainly a number of other complicated issues will be discussed in Varna, including developments in Turkey and its actions in Syria. Still, we are neighbours and we need to find a way to talk to each other openly and cooperate in areas of common interest.

As regards President Trump's decision on tariffs, I will leave it to Jean-Claude, as we stand by the Commission on this issue.

During our discussion on EMU, President Draghi recalled that the EU economy is back to pre-crisis growth levels and remains extremely strong. In fact, we are experiencing the most favourable situation since the introduction of the euro, which makes this a very good time to reflect strategically on our long-term ambitions. This is what today's Euro summit was all about. Many of the themes we discussed – like a fiscal capacity for the euro area – are controversial, but I see avenues to be explored. In June we will come back to take concrete decisions, and provide guidance on the way forward. The most urgent political priority remains strengthening the Banking Union and further developing the ESM. This is my goal.

On Brexit. We want to use the positive momentum in the negotiations to finally settle outstanding issues such as the solution to avoid a hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland. In parallel, we will start our first talks about the future EU-UK relationship. Leaders will assess in June if the Irish question has been resolved, and how to go about a common declaration on our future.

Let me conclude by expressing my concern over what seems to be an ongoing terrorist attack in Southern France. We are following this closely as we stand in full solidarity with France and its people.

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