

Remarks by President Charles Michel after his meeting with Prime Minister of Croatia Andrej Plenković

First of all, I would like to thank you, Prime Minister, dear Andrej, for our meeting. And I would like to congratulate you and your country on the first presidency. It's a very important moment for your country. It's also a very important moment for the European Union. I am optimistic because I know it will be possible to develop a very strong, very close cooperation in order to face together the difficult challenges ahead.

The first topic, first priority, we discussed at this point today, this morning is the next **European budget**.

It is very important. It's not a technical discussion. It is a political discussion. What are the European priorities? How is it possible to take strong decisions in order to face all the important challenges we have to face. Like climate change, like the digital agenda, like migration, like innovation. How is it possible to find the right balance between the classical European policies – more convergence at the European level through the cohesion funds, the support for an important sector, agriculture pillar one. Pillar two – with the new challenges we have to face like migration, like climate change, like innovation. How is it possible also to find compromises regarding the conditionality, regarding, maybe, the own resources? It is an important debate started in the European Parliament. How is it possible to develop a strong and close inter-institutional cooperation? Because, of course, the European Council has an important role to play.

The rotating presidency, your country, your government has also an important role to play. But the European Parliament has also a role to play in this process. And that's why the Prime Minister Andrej Plenković and myself, we will work in order to have a close cooperation with the European Parliament and with the different members of the European Parliament more involved in this important topic. And I hope it will be possible, as soon as possible, to make progress in order to give a strong signal. We are ready and we are able to challenge all the difficulties we have to challenge.

Point two, **Brexit**. But it is, of course, a British choice and we have to show respect for this choice. The withdrawal agreement is not agreed, and it means that the first priority will be to implement the withdrawal agreement, especially to respect the rights of the citizens, the European citizens, the British citizens. It is an important part of the withdrawal agreement.

But we have to prepare the next step. It will be complex. It will be difficult. And we will be very loyal in these negotiations. But we will promote and defend the European interests. The level playing field will be very important for the European companies, for the European citizens, for the competitiveness in Europe. And we hope it will be possible to find the right

channel of communication, the right channel of negotiations.

We have shown in recent years the possibility at the European level to guarantee the unity between the member states. And I think that is the way of working for the next step will also guarantee this important priority for us, the unity between the member states. We know that the timing will be a part of the difficulties, but we will be really committed in order to make progress, also regarding this important topic, in order to guarantee more predictability in the short term, in the mid-term. It's important for companies and for citizens.

Third point, and I know it is an important point in this country, but not only in this country, how is it possible to guarantee more stability, more security in our neighbourhood. How is it possible to give, from the European Union, a strong and clear signal to the neighbourhood? And also regarding the enlargement process, especially for two countries, Northern Macedonia and Albania.

And we had a few months ago in European Council a very important strategic decision. But we observed that it was not possible to reach an agreement in the European Council. It means that it will be very important in the next weeks together, the Prime Minister Plenković and myself, will be together very committed to develop a stronger political preparation in order to be able to make the clarity and to give, I hope, a clear signal. It means that we have, I hope, it will be possible to make progress on the modernization of the enlargement process and to see how is it possible to give the clarity for the different countries.

We will have the occasion later to discuss other important topics. One word, and it's important, I think, about the role we have to play as European Union at the external level. I think it is very important. We are a union with more than five hundred million citizens. We are an economic power, a strong economic power, and I'm convinced, at the international level, that we have to promote more our values, to promote more and to defend more our interests. It means, in Middle East, for example, that we have to be involved. And that's why I try as President of the European Council, to develop many channels of communication.

I spoke this morning by phone with President Rouhani. I will be in Turkey and in Egypt Saturday. I try to develop many channels of communication because I think the dialogue, the negotiation, is very important and it's important to make progress, to take steps in the good direction. And that's why, with all our partners, we will continue this dialogue. We will try to develop the channels of communication, because I think it is very important for the European Union not only to observe what others would decide for us, but it's important for the European Union to be an actor, to be a player and to promote and to defend our interests.

The stability, the security, to prevent more difficulties, to prevent more conflicts is key for our own stability, for our own security, for our own prosperity. So strong commitment. I want Europe to be part of the game. I want Europe more involved at the external level. And you will have the

occasion, close cooperation with the member states to be very active, to be very committed, not only in the short term and also in the mid-term and in the long term. Thank you.