

Council of the European Union: (23.4.16)

Remarks by President Donald Tusk during his visit to Turkey

Good evening. Let me first of all thank Prime Minister Davutoglu for the invitation to Gaziantep today. We last met in Brussels on 18 March, when we concluded an ambitious agreement between the European Union and Turkey with an aim to stem irregular migration and to create a legal avenue for refugees to seek and obtain asylum in Europe. Our visit here today is part of the follow-up to that agreement.

Combined with other actions we have taken together with the Western Balkans countries, in Greece and by stepping up our support to refugees in third countries, we are starting to see results.

Since the March agreement we have seen a sharp reduction of the illegal migration flows across the Aegean. Our return operations are working in tandem with resettlements of Syrian nationals from Turkey to EU Member States, demonstrating the desired shift from illegal to legal migration.

This is a big and complex undertaking and much work still lies ahead of us. Our visit here today gives us the opportunity to discuss with Prime Minister Davutoglu the further implementation and next steps.

Today I also had another opportunity to assess the situation with regard to the Syrian refugees in Turkey. After visiting a refugee camp in Nizip, I was pleased also to participate in the inauguration of a child protection centre in Gaziantep on the occasion of the National Sovereignty and Children's Day in Turkey. A number of other projects are currently being launched through the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey. Programming under the Facility has been accelerated.

Beyond our cooperation on the migration crisis, we will take stock of our revitalised bilateral relations. It also includes an accelerated roadmap for visa liberalisation. The way I see it, Turkey has made good progress ahead of decisions to be taken this summer, provided that Turkey meets all the agreed benchmarks.

One of the most crucial subjects of our discussion will be the conflict in Syria and the need for political talks to get back on track. Recent attacks on civilians and the prevention of humanitarian access are cynical attempts to derail the only real chance to stop the bloodshed.

Today Turkey is the best example in the entire world of how to treat refugees. I am proud that we are partners. There is no other way.

Let me conclude, Prime Minister Davutoglu, Ahmet, by thanking you once again for your invitation.

