

Remarks by President Donald Tusk after the informal meeting of EU heads of State or government in Gothenburg

First of all, warm thanks to our host, Prime Minister Löfven, for the initiative to discuss the social dimension here in Gothenburg. Sweden is probably the best place in Europe to discuss social issues. Not only because you have the highest employment rate in the EU, but above all Sweden is a global champion in social justice, inclusion and equality. That is why we all want to use your positive example while building more equality and solidarity among European citizens. And I will personally make sure that the outcome of today's summit is reflected in our December European Council conclusions.

Let me turn to education and culture. It was our first debate under the Leaders' Agenda. We had a constructive discussion about eight concrete ideas, which were suggested not by Brussels, not by the institutions, but by Member States. One example is to make the Erasmus programme more inclusive, so that an increasing number of Europeans benefit from getting to know each others' cultures, while living and studying in another EU country. The second example is the European Student Card, which started out as a cooperation between France and Italy. It was later expanded to cover Germany and Ireland. Now the idea is to extend the geographical scope of this initiative and to offer cardholders access to cultural sites and activities across Europe.

During our meeting today, we established political support for these ideas. And in line with our new working method, I will make sure that this support is included in the conclusions of the European Council. The financial aspect of our plans will have to be reflected in the next multiannual budget discussion.

Before concluding let me make a short assessment of the Brexit talks, which I shared with Prime Minister May earlier today.

In October, the EU27 started internal preparations on the second phase of negotiations, namely transition and the future relationship. And we will be ready to move-on to the second phase already in December. But in order to do that we need to see more progress from the UK side. While good progress on citizens' rights is being made, we need to see much more progress on Ireland and on a financial settlement. In order to avoid any ambiguities about our work calendar, I made it very clear to Prime Minister May that this progress needs to happen at the beginning of December at the latest. If there is no sufficient progress by then, I will not be in a position to propose new guidelines on transition and the future relationship at the December European Council. We agreed to meet again next Friday to assess the situation in more detail.

Thank you.

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