



European Council
The President

Brussels, 20 March 2019

Dear colleagues,

As we meet tomorrow for the European Council, let me start with Brexit, which will be the first topic of our discussions.

Today I received a letter from Prime Minister May, in which she addresses the European Council with two requests: to approve the so-called Strasbourg agreement between the UK and the European Commission, and to extend the Article 50 period until the 30th of June 2019.

In the light of the consultations that I have been conducting over the past days, I believe that we could consider a short extension conditional on a positive vote on the Withdrawal Agreement in the House of Commons. The question remains open as to the duration of such an extension. Prime Minister May's proposal, of the 30th of June, which has its merits, creates a series of questions of a legal and political nature. We will discuss it in detail tomorrow. When it comes to the approval of the Strasbourg agreement, I believe that this is possible, and in my view it does not create risks. Especially if it were to help the ratification process in the UK.

At this time I do not foresee an extraordinary European Council. If you were to approve my recommendations, and if there were a positive vote in the House of Commons next week, we could finalise and formalise the decision on the extension using a written procedure.

Even if the hope for a final success may seem frail, even illusory, and although Brexit fatigue is increasingly visible and justified, we cannot give up seeking – until the very last moment – a positive solution, of course without opening up the Withdrawal Agreement. We have reacted with patience and goodwill to numerous turns of events, and I am confident that, also now, we will not lack the same patience and goodwill, at this most critical point in this process.

Beyond Brexit we will also address the longer-term issues facing us. In a more unstable world, shaken by new global, technological and environmental realities, there is no doubt that only together can we set our own course and defend the strategic interests of the Union. This is true whether we are talking about strengthening our economic base, combating unfair practices or tackling climate change. We will therefore discuss how to use all the levers at our disposal to safeguard the interests of our citizens and companies. China is a key global player in all these issues. We will have an in-depth exchange of views on the direction of our overall relations with China, ahead of the upcoming EU-China summit. On Ukraine, five years after the illegal annexation of Crimea, we stand firm in our commitment to Ukrainian sovereignty. We will adopt conclusions recalling our resolve. Finally, setting our own course also means protecting our democracies from manipulation and interference from inside and outside the EU. We will return to efforts to combat the threat of disinformation and to protect elections across the EU.

The European Council will start on Thursday afternoon with our usual exchange with President Tajani. We will then turn to Prime Minister May who will share her assessment of the latest developments regarding Brexit. After this, we will discuss the next steps concerning Brexit at 27. We will reconvene at 28 for dinner to discuss our relations with China. The following day, we will celebrate 25 years of cooperation with our partners from the European Economic Area. Next, we will start the Friday morning working session with a debriefing from President Iohannis on progress in implementing our previous conclusions. The European Council will discuss the economic situation in the presence of President Draghi. We will then address the future of our economic base, climate change, disinformation and the protection of elections and adopt the conclusions. I expect our meeting to conclude by lunchtime.

Yours sincerely,



D. TUSK