



Opening remarks by President Donald Tusk at the EU-LAS summit in Egypt

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Thank you for being here today. And a special thank you to President Al Sisi for the warm hospitality in hosting us. It is clear to us how much you have done to ensure the perfect organisation of this Summit. It is a true pleasure to be in Sharm El-Sheikh.

Our meeting is special as it marks the first time that we, Arab and European leaders, come together in this format. To acknowledge that our cooperation is more important than ever, and that we need an even stronger partnership in today's world.

Our proximity and interdependence require us to face our common challenges together and seize the real opportunities that geography, common history and similar interests have created. These are objective reasons why we have to be closer. Our neighbourhood is something real, which means that being closer is in fact not a choice but a must, although we are aware that there are differences between us. With neighbours there are two ways of existence: cooperation or conflict. We choose cooperation.

In a time of growing tension and unpredictability, we need to work together, taking into account our shared interests and common challenges to create the right conditions for long-term stability, which is the only way to guarantee our citizens the peace and prosperity they deserve. We must show them that our cooperation is comprehensive, strong and has a concrete impact on their everyday lives.

There are many areas where we can do this: from funding education to reducing unemployment; encouraging investments, and helping to boost trade.

Climate change is a direct and existential threat for all of us. Unless we act urgently and collectively, things will only get worse. We need to raise our ambitions and work closely to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement. We still have the chance to act, but we need the spur of real political will to act together.

Young people have to be at the centre of our policies and efforts. Only they can fully realise the 2030 Agenda, prevent conflicts, sustain peace and build a truly inclusive prosperity. Let us empower our young women and men to be positive agents of change.

Fostering intercultural dialogue, empowering a vibrant civil society and prioritising education and

opportunity can help create peaceful and stable societies, less susceptible to the messages of violent extremism, and to counter-balance the negative impact that populist narratives can have on the resilience of our societies.

Finally, on migration. I want to acknowledge and salute all those here who have shouldered the burden of population displacement, helped refugees and acted early to tackle people smuggling. We must work together – countries of origin, transit and destination. In order to break the business model of smugglers and traffickers who lure people into dangerous journeys and feed modern-day slavery. To address the root causes of migration and displacement. To stop irregular migration, and facilitate returns, readmission and reintegration. And also to ensure the protection of refugees and their rights, in line with international law.

I am aware that there are differences between us. We are not here to pretend that we agree on everything. But we face common challenges and have shared interests. Today we are here to strengthen our cooperation for the benefit of our peoples. We need to do this together and not leave it to global powers far from our region. I look forward to our open and honest discussions over the next two days. Thank you.

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