

Common Statement by the Foreign Ministers of Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands

The Foreign Ministers of Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands take note with regret of the fact that the British people have spoken out against EU-Membership. The decision of the British people marks a watershed moment in the history of Europe. The European Union is losing not only a member state, but a host of history, tradition and experience.

This creates a new situation. As a consequence of the decision of the British people, the agreement the European Council had found on 18/19 February ceases to exist. We now expect the UK government to provide clarity and give effect to this decision as soon as possible. The relevant provisions of the Lisbon Treaty (article 50 TEU) provide for an orderly departure. We stand ready to work with the institutions once the negotiations in order to define and clarify the future relations between the EU and the UK will start.

We remain of the firmest belief that the European Union provides a historically unique and indispensable framework for the pursuit of freedom, prosperity and security in Europe, for shaping peaceful and mutually beneficial relationships amongst its people and for contributing to peace and stability in the world.

Since its creation in 1957 by the six founding Members, the EU has gone a long and successful way. It has reunited Eastern and Western Europe and it has brought about the longest period of peace on our continent in modern times. Moreover, it has been a driving force to bring the people of Europe together and thereby delivered on its promise that we have committed ourselves to in the treaties: To create an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe. We will continue in our efforts to work for a stronger and more cohesive European Union of 27 based on common values and the rule of law.

It is to that end that we shall also recognize different levels of ambition amongst Member States when it comes to the project of European integration. While not stepping back from what we have achieved, we have to find better ways of dealing with these different levels of ambition so as to ensure that Europe delivers better on the expectations of all European citizens.

It is in this light that we strongly reaffirm our joint commitment to the European Union. However, we are aware that discontent with the functioning of the EU as it is today is manifest in parts of our societies. We take this very seriously and are determined to make the EU work better for all our citizens. Neither a simple call for more Europe nor a phase of mere reflection can be an adequate answer. We have to focus our common efforts on those challenges which can only be addressed by common European answers, while leaving other tasks to national or regional levels. We must better deliver on those issues that we have chosen to tackle on the European level. And we must accept our responsibility to reinforce solidarity and cohesion within the European Union.

Today, Europe is faced with huge challenges in a globalized world that require a better European Union: We must further concentrate the EU's activities in today's main challenges: ensuring the security of our citizens in the face of growing external and internal threats; establishing a stable and cooperative framework to deal with migration and refugee flows; boost the European economy through promoting the convergence of our economies, a sustainable and job-creating growth and advancing towards the completion of the European Monetary Union. These challenges take place against a backdrop of growing instability and geopolitical changes at our European borders.

We express our confidence in our common European future.

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