

Press Release
3 February 2017

Benelux vision on the future of Europe

As founding member states, we are determined to make a success of the EU with 27 member states, building on their joint history and achievements. The European Union is more than the mere sum of its member states; it is founded on common values, with the ambition of bringing people together and working for their common good. We firmly believe that it remains the best answer to face today's challenging times and shape tomorrow's world. We wish to strengthen our cooperation, notably by taking the following principles into account:

- The Treaties remain the solid base for further cooperation that will strengthen the four freedoms, the internal market, the social dimension including a social market economy and a strong and competitive Eurozone. Thereby the EU remains the source of prosperity and welfare to the benefit of our citizens.
- Respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights are the backbone and the very fundament on which cooperation between member states in the European Union is based. The member states and the institutions share the duty to uphold and promote them. This implies regular dialogue among member states on their observance.
- The EU will focus on its core priorities. Based on the subsidiarity and proportionality principles, the EU shall only act if and in so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the member states, either at central level or at regional and local level, but can rather, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action be achieved at Union level. The EU will only do what member states themselves are not able to deliver for their citizens. This also implies that the Union will need to act firmly in areas of clear European added value. It should spend its financial resources accordingly.
- The institutions and the community method remain the best guarantee for the EU to focus on common interests and for preserving the equilibrium between interests of all member states.
- With a view to increasing trust and confidence in the EU, the institutions and the member states share a common responsibility to further strengthen a democratic and transparent formulation and decision-making processes. Consistent and rigorous implementation and application of the EU acquis, including European Council and Council decisions and conclusions is of the utmost importance. Confidence in well-functioning governance and the rule of law in member states is critical to the internal market, the Schengen area and further development of the EU.
- Different paths of integration and enhanced cooperation could provide for effective responses to challenges that affect member states in different ways. These arrangements

should be inclusive and transparent, with the greatest possible involvement of the other member states and EU institutions.

In the 21st century, the EU needs to have the capabilities to react to the global challenges we see ourselves confronted with. We need to further build an EU that lives up to the expectations and ambitions of our citizens, and strengthen the EU's abilities to protect and perform.

Beyond the strategic agenda adopted by the European Council in June 2014, we have set the right priorities in the Bratislava declaration and its roadmap. It is now most urgent to put all efforts on implementation of this agenda. We must innovate and improve the way we cooperate to move from a phase of analysis and reflection to a phase of delivery of concrete benefits for our citizens. The principles indicated above will serve to support this goal.