

Donald Tusk: Stakes are very high and time is short on migration crisis

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News

European Council Donald Tusk has urged the EU28 to take a more strategic look at how to manage migration.



Donald Tusk | *Photo credit: European Parliament audiovisual*

The warning comes amid the latest migration crisis to hit Europe, and as EU leaders descend on Brussels for a two-day summit.

Tusk, the summit host, said in a letter to leaders, “More and more people are starting to believe that only strong-handed authority, anti-European and anti-liberal in spirit, with a tendency towards overt authoritarianism, is capable of stopping the wave of illegal migration.

“The stakes are very high and time is short,” he warned.

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While the crisis has not yet reached the scale of events in 2015, this month’s tensions over migrant rescue boats, barred from entry to Italian and Maltese ports, have put the issue firmly back in the EU spotlight.

Tusk, a former Polish Prime Minister, said, “A precondition for a genuine EU migration policy is that Europeans effectively decide who enters European territory. Failure to achieve this goal would in fact be a manifestation of our weakness, and above all, it could create the impression that Europe does not have an external border.”

The letter to the EU leaders went on, “The people of Europe expect us - and they have done for a long time now - to show determination in our actions aimed at restoring their sense of security. People want this not because they have, all of a sudden, become xenophobic and want to put up walls against the rest of the world, but because it is the job of every political authority to enforce the law, to protect its territory and the border.

That was, after all, the purpose of creating border guards - to guard borders.”

He wrote, “There are voices in Europe and around the world claiming that our inefficiency in maintaining the external border is an inherent feature of the European Union, or - more broadly - of liberal democracy. We have seen the creation of new political movements, which offer simple answers to the most complicated questions. Simple, radical and attractive.”

Tusk, writing ahead of the two-day gathering, said, “The migration crisis provides them with a growing number of arguments. More and more people are starting to believe that only strong-handed authority, anti-European and anti-liberal in spirit, with a tendency towards overt authoritarianism, is capable of stopping the wave of illegal migration. If people believe them, that only they can offer an effective solution to the migration crisis, they will also believe anything else they say.”

Brexit, apart from migration, is expected to dominate the summit. Tusk said that on Friday, he and EU Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier “will review progress in our negotiations with the UK, and we will adopt conclusions.”

UK Prime Minister Theresa May was warned that time is running out to secure a Brexit deal as she headed for the summit, where she will brief all her counterparts for the last time before October, when both sides hope a deal will be done on the UK’s March 2019 departure.

The remaining 27 EU leaders will discuss Brexit on their own on Friday morning, by which point May is expected to have left Brussels.

Irish leader Leo Varadkar said the lack of progress was “disappointing”, adding that he expected fellow leaders to send a “strong message” to May that talks had to “intensify”. He said he will warn the UK that the Brexit withdrawal agreement and the two-year transition are at risk if London does not make more progress on agreeing the so-called backstop to avoid a hard border on the island of Ireland.

On the eve of the summit, UK Conservative MEP Ashley Fox said he hopes the summit will see EU decide to take a “more proactive approach” to the Brexit negotiations.

The ECR group member told this website, “Businesses based in the EU, UK and across the globe have made clear this week they want to see a withdrawal agreement concluded as soon as possible to provide legal certainty for the transition period. The UK government wants that too, has submitted its Irish border backstop proposal and is ready to negotiate constructively.

“The EU has to do more than simply say no. We have never tackled an issue like this before and must work together to find creative solutions.

“I hope leaders use this week’s summit to order a change in the Commission’s negotiating strategy to put jobs and our economies above rules and precedent.”

About the author

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