



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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*Mr László KÖVÉR
President of the Országgyűlés*

*Mr Milan ŠTĚCH
President of the Senát*

*Mr Radek VONDRÁČEK
President of the Poslanecká
sněmovna*

*Mr Marek KUCHARCZYŃSKI
Marshal of the Sejm*

*Mr Stanisław KARCZEWSKI
Marshal of the Senat*

*Mr Andrej DANKO
President of the Národná rada*

Dear Presidents,

The Commission would like to thank the Országgyűlés, the Senát, the Poslanecká sněmovna, the Sejm, the Senat and the Národná rada for their Joint Statement on the official meeting of the Speakers/Presidents of the Visegrád Group Parliaments in Budapest on 2 March 2018.

The Commission welcomes the wish of the Országgyűlés, the Senát, the Poslanecká sněmovna, the Sejm, the Senat and the Národná rada to contribute constructively to the debate on the future of the European Union. National Parliaments play an essential role in bringing the European Union closer to its citizens, and the Commission supports their involvement in the discussions and the policy-making process relating to the Future of the European Union.

The Commission takes note of the preference of the Országgyűlés, the Senát, the Poslanecká sněmovna, the Sejm, the Senat and the Národná rada for 'a strong and efficient Europe'. The Commission agrees that adherence to fundamental rights and to the rule of law are indispensable for the European success story to continue. The Commission also takes the view that Europe must be more united. As President Juncker underlined in his State of the Union address 2017, Europe must be a Union of equality

and a Union of citizens with equal rights. There must be equality between its Member States, big or small, East or West, North or South.

The Commission believes that subsidiarity and proportionality are the guiding principles for action by the European Union. While the Treaties provide that national Parliaments ensure compliance with the principle of subsidiarity, the Commission also thoroughly checks the compliance of its initiatives with the principle of proportionality. When replying to Opinions or Reasoned Opinions of national Parliaments, it addresses both subsidiarity and proportionality issues, as well as all other issues, political and technical, raised by the Parliaments in their Opinions.

The Commission is always ready to discuss proposals from national Parliaments as part of the political dialogue. In 2015 and 2016, it has given detailed replies to the so-called 'green cards' it has received, respectively on food waste and on corporate social responsibility. As regards the 'green card' on food waste, some of the main political points were subsequently reflected in the revised Circular Economy package, adopted by the Commission in December 2015. These examples show that national Parliaments play a very constructive role in the preparation of Union legislative action.

I would also like to add that the Task Force on Subsidiarity, Proportionality and 'Doing Less More Efficiently', which was set up by President Juncker in November 2017, is currently reflecting on how to better apply the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality in the work of the Union's Institutions. The suggestions raised in the Joint Statement are currently being examined by the Task Force. I look forward to seeing the final report that it will present to President Juncker mid July. The work of the Task Force will contribute to the further evolution of the European Union in the context of the Commission's Roadmap for a more united, stronger and more democratic Union. The Roadmap will be completed in time before the European Parliament elections at a Leaders' meeting in Sibiu (Romania) on 9 May 2019¹.

The challenges of the migration crisis of 2015 demonstrated the need for Member States and the institutions of the European Union to cooperate closely, effectively and with responsibility and solidarity to manage the crisis and ensure that the Union creates a solid framework to deal with such challenges in the future. These challenges necessitated a comprehensive approach, which was set out in the European Agenda for Migration. For the last three years, the European Union has offered immediate assistance to those in need, saved people's lives, provided operational and financial assistance to those Members States affected by the unprecedented migratory pressure, and improved the control of the Union's external borders, namely by creating a European Border and Coast Guard Agency, as well as the functioning of the Schengen area, while ensuring a balance between the need to ensure freedom of movement and addressing important security threats. The Commission has tabled proposals to build a strong and comprehensive asylum system that is resilient to future crises and where both solidarity and responsibility guide action by the Union and Member States. The European Agenda

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/roadmap-factsheet-tallinn_en.pdf

on Migration continues to provide a comprehensive framework for the European Union to address migration challenges, with a continuously high migratory pressure and against the background of geopolitical fragility and long-term demographic and socio-economic changes in Europe's neighbourhood and beyond.

The Commission agrees with the Országgyűlés, the Senát, the Poslanecká sněmovna, the Sejm, the Senat and the Národná rada on the need to maintain an open stance to integration and to focus on the countries closest to the European Union. The objective of stability lies at the heart of the revised Neighbourhood Policy, adopted in November 2015. The Eastern Partnership Summit in November 2017 was an important milestone in the development of the Eastern Partnership and reconfirmed the clear and continued commitment and common ground by both the European Union and the six partner countries. On 6 February 2018, the Commission adopted the Communication 'A credible enlargement perspective for an enhanced engagement of the European Union with the Western Balkans'. On 17 April 2018, the Commission adopted its enlargement package, including country reports on the Western Balkans. The European Union – Western Balkan Summit, which took place on 17 May, focused on this strengthened engagement and on deliverables under the six flagship initiatives defined in the Communication. This was reflected in the Sofia Declaration of the 28 Member States of the European Union and in its Annex (the 'Sofia Priority Agenda').

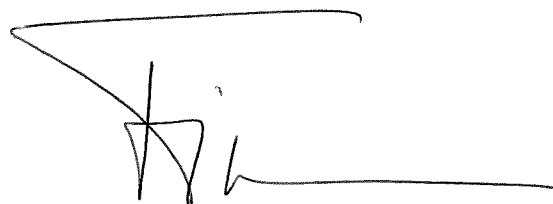
The withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union is an extraordinary and unprecedented event. The European Commission regrets the decision of the United Kingdom to withdraw from the European Union, but it respects this democratic choice. The Commission agrees with the Országgyűlés, the Senát, the Poslanecká sněmovna, the Sejm, the Senat and the Národná rada that protecting the rights of the citizens of the European Union is a primary consideration in the negotiations with the United Kingdom. Significant progress has been made by the negotiators, with full agreement reached on the legal text of the citizens' rights part of the Withdrawal Agreement. However, other issues still require agreement in legal form, and negotiations can only progress as long as all commitments undertaken so far are respected in full. Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.

For the future, the Commission wishes to have a partnership with the United Kingdom which is as close as possible. Any such agreement will have to be based on a balance of rights and obligations, and ensure a level playing field. The European Council guidelines of 23 March 2018 on the framework of the future relationship reflect the level of rights and obligations compatible with the positions stated by the United Kingdom. If these positions were to evolve, the Union will be prepared to reconsider its offer in accordance with the principles stated in the guidelines of 29 April and 25 December 2017 as well as in the guidelines of 23 March 2018. According to these guidelines, a partnership with the United Kingdom should cover trade and economic cooperation and areas such as the fight against terrorism and international crime, defence and foreign policy.

The Commission also takes note of the conclusions adopted in the meetings of the Committees on European Affairs, the Committees on Foreign Affairs, the Economic Committees, the committees dedicated to family policy issues, the Agriculture Committees and the Defence Committees of the Parliament of the Visegrád Group.

The Commission hopes that these clarifications address the issues raised by the Országgyűlés, the Senát, the Poslanecká sněmovna, the Sejm, the Senat and the Národní rada and looks forward to continuing the political dialogue with them in the future.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'F' followed by 'Timmermans' in a cursive script.

*Frans Timmermans
First Vice-President*