

**Benelux Prime Ministers' Summit**

**Luxembourg, 2 April 2019**

**Joint Declaration**

On 5 September 1944, the governments of our three countries, while still in exile in London, signed the Benelux Customs Union Convention. Today, 75 years later, we reaffirm our attachment to the Benelux cooperation as well as our determination to pursue coordinated efforts to promote further integration in our three countries and beyond. In line with the Benelux declaration on the future of Europe of 8 February 2017, and in the interest of our citizens, we will work together closely to determine the priorities for the EU for the coming legislative cycle with the Strategic Agenda of the European Council, and to deliver results on these priorities. In a year marked by European Union (EU) institutional changes, it is also relevant to look into ways to strengthen the functioning of the EU.

In the context of today's most pressing challenges, the Benelux countries are committed to implementing the goals of the Paris Agreement. With a view to reaching the net-zero emission scenario, we welcome the proposal for a long-term climate strategy for the EU, which should form the basis for discussions on the future EU climate policy in the framework of the strategic agenda. We strongly support this work to be taken forward and the EU to submit an ambitious long-term strategy by 2020, striving for climate neutrality by 2050 at the latest, in line with the 1.5 degrees Celsius objective of the Paris Agreement. We call on the Council to reach an agreement on the long-term strategy so the EU can show leadership at the UN Climate Summit in September, and be the first large economic bloc to commit to climate neutrality in 2050. We will continue to coordinate the National Integrated Energy and Climate Plans. We actively promote the raising of awareness and education of our citizens about the challenges of the transition to a more sustainable society, both on the international as well as on the regional level.

We have to be pioneers in the energy transition. We underline the close cooperation of the Benelux on energy in the overall framework of the Pentalateral Forum and support the strengthening of this cooperation in the framework of the National Energy and Climate Plans. The energy distribution in the Benelux needs an enhanced interconnection of the networks and better sustainability through the increased use of renewable energy. We invite all Benelux actors to concentrate on energy efficiency and to take initiatives in this field.

The Benelux Union is committed to an ambitious trade policy that promotes European values and the highest social and environmental standards. In this context, the Benelux countries,

highlighting the role of a responsible trade policy in tackling climate change, agree that the ratification and implementation of the Paris Agreement should become an essential element of the EU's comprehensive trade agreements. We support the common efforts of the Benelux Union to be a frontrunner in the transition to a circular economy and wish to implement, where possible, the results of the study on the reparability of products published by the Benelux Secretariat in June 2018.

We emphasise the crucial role of the Benelux in shaping the European Union's development with an aim to ensuring the economic and social wellbeing of its citizens as well as their security. In this regard, we emphasize the importance to foster competitiveness in the European Union, build on a strong Single Market, and invest in innovation to speed up the transition towards a digital and sustainable economy. In this context, the Benelux countries continue to support the EU efforts to ensure a global level playing field.

The strengthening of the EU, its Single Market, the banking union, and deepening its economic and monetary union, remain key objectives for the Benelux countries. These objectives go hand in hand with the protection of democracy and the strengthening of the rule of law. Furthermore, a common and comprehensive European migration policy, based on solidarity and responsibility and which is rights-based as well as rule-based, is essential to cope with the current and future challenges in this field. We will do our utmost to ensure that the EU adopts a modernised, balanced, adequately funded multiannual financial framework post 2020, enabling it to provide genuine European added value and to meet its political priorities agreed in Rome and Bratislava. Regarding Brexit, we will promote a close and comprehensive partnership with the United Kingdom after its withdrawal from the EU, ensuring the integrity of the Single Market, the decision making autonomy of the EU, and ensuring a level playing field in all relevant policy areas.

We will continue to strive for a more integrated Single Market that creates growth and jobs in the Benelux countries, with a specific focus on successfully managing the digital transition in the European economy. We need to reduce the challenges of cross-border exchanges for entrepreneurs and consumers, through improved implementation, application and enforcement of existing rules and by improving the provision of information to entrepreneurs and citizens on conducting businesses in the Benelux countries. Furthermore, the Benelux should conduct further research on cross-border activities that should serve as a basis for future policy-making on the Single Market. The Benelux should set an example for this in the EU.

We reaffirm our determination to address the issue of unjustified territorial supply constraints in the retail sector, which artificially fragment the Single Market, including in the Benelux countries. The Benelux Working Group in charge will continue to coordinate its efforts in this area, as well as explore an inclusion of the non-retail sector.

Equally important in the Single Market is the possibility for our citizens to work across borders. Therefore, we will look at the process around the recognition of diplomas in our various countries and aim to streamline these in order to make the process transparent and easy to follow for people aiming to work across borders.

We believe that efficient transport systems are essential to a more integrated Benelux. The development of intelligent transport systems (ITS) should therefore be a priority and we fully support the projects in the Benelux ITS corridor. In addition, on 5 March 2018, a project on the digital consignment note was launched, examining the reliability and safety of this digital tool in a cross-border context. It is the goal of the Benelux to expand this project to inland navigation.

We also express our support to the ongoing efforts of the Benelux to integrate the digitalisation process in our health systems in the interest of patients and health professionals.

In the area of security, our countries have a long tradition of close cooperation. We highly value the strong and deep defence cooperation between our countries, including the joint protection of our airspace. On internal aspects, cross-border crimes and the continuing terrorist threat require further reinforcement of our cooperation, including our continuous efforts to deepen police cooperation. As such, we welcome the signature of the Benelux Police Treaty on 23 July 2018 and we aim for a quick implementation. This Treaty will allow better information sharing between our police services and extend the scope of cross border action. Furthermore, we intend to combine and strengthen our efforts on disaster and crisis management.

We welcome the longstanding international cooperation on migration and our common support for a comprehensive migration policy, including at the European level, as well as developing programs that address the root causes of irregular migration. Where possible, we coordinate our policies and cooperate to address common challenges. This includes joint action on return and readmission issues, on which we intend to strengthen our operational and practical cooperation.

The Benelux Union continues to drive regional integration inside the EU. Therefore, we underline the importance of close cooperation with our neighbouring regions, with which we share a common social and economic environment. In this regard, we can look back on more than 10 years of successful cooperation with North-Rhine-Westphalia. We will give this cooperation a further impetus by adopting a renewed political declaration today. We also welcome the Political Declaration signed on 11 December 2018 between our three countries and France, which will intensify the cross-border cooperation with France and in particular the regions of Hauts-de-France and Grand-Est.

The Benelux countries will seek to engage with other Member States, including the Nordic, the Visegrad and the Baltic states in order to develop joint initiatives that shape EU-decision making and achieve results.

We firmly believe that the Benelux cooperation, including its cross border cooperation with neighbouring partners, can serve as a model for regional cooperation outside the EU. We will therefore continue to reach out to partners outside the EU, including through joint visits to third countries.

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