

## Joint Declaration Benelux Summit

### Benelux as sustainable and innovative frontrunner

8 November 2017

1. We, the Prime Ministers of Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, see the Benelux Union as a unique, regional organization that leads by example to find solutions to cross-border issues for the benefit of our countries, citizens and businesses. We emphasize the crucial role of the Benelux in re-enforcing the EU's internal market. Our goal is to position the Benelux as a sustainable and innovative frontrunner within the EU. With this goal in mind, we have agreed on the following.
2. We will undertake steps for a **more integrated, future proof and fair European internal market** beyond 2017 with the aim to create growth and jobs in our countries:
  - The Benelux Retail 2025 study<sup>1</sup> found that a single Benelux market would constitute the 3<sup>rd</sup> market on the European continent in size, after Germany and France. Based on the results from the survey done from November 2016 to April 2017 and to be published by the end of the year, the Benelux Working Group on Territorial Supply Constraints will continue to coordinate their efforts on how to deal with territorial supply constraints. The Benelux will work on identifying national differences in product requirements that hinder the Benelux retail sector in reaching its full potential, such as national differences in product requirements.
  - In order to further develop, taking into account the Tallinn Digital Summit and their collective commitment to push this at the European level, the Digital Benelux launched at the Benelux Summit in October 2016, we will identify and tackle existing barriers for entrepreneurs and consumers, with a special focus on the online services market and digital innovation.
  - To deepen the integration of the internal market, and to fuel economic development, cross border transport and passenger traffic will be stimulated, and improved in the border regions. The mobility platform will help to cooperate more intensively on transport and mobility issues, and strengthen the competitiveness of our countries.
3. We will **support our industries in their efforts to become innovative and sustainable pioneers within the EU**, boosting the energy transition. In this respect, we welcome the European Commission's Communication on industrial strategy<sup>2</sup>. This strategy should be translated into concrete actions and should also include objectives for the medium run. We will engage in joint initiatives to strengthen the innovative capacity of our industry, so it can benefit from the opportunities and deal with the challenges related to ongoing digitization and the transition towards a low carbon, and more sustainable, economy:
  - We will contribute to a joint roadmap with the purpose to maximize the cooperation between our own and European industries.
  - We will strengthen our position as the platform for regional energy cooperation, to develop the Energy Union bottom up.
  - On 1 December 2017 we will start a test with the digital consignment note within the Benelux. This will significantly reduce administrative costs.
  - Our experts will continue to elaborate the general crisis management agreements of the Benelux Memorandum of Understanding (2006)<sup>3</sup> in the area of nuclear emergency preparedness and response and in the area of nuclear safety.
4. We will exchange labor market information and data to **roll out cross-border employment policies** in the Benelux's border regions:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.benelux.int/files/6914/8976/2381/526-Retail-EN-draft8.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Investing in a smart, innovative and sustainable Industry: A renewed EU Industrial Policy Strategy', 13 September 2017

<sup>3</sup> Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in crisis management with potential cross-border implications (2006)

- In 2018, we will realize a Benelux publication that will combine labor market information and data from the northern Benelux with information and data of the southern part of the Benelux, in order to obtain a complete overview of the labor market of the Benelux contributing to policymaking both in the Benelux and at European level.
  - We will continue to facilitate the recognition of higher education degrees and finalize the Benelux directive for the recognition of professional qualifications in 2018.
5. We will **maximize strategic and operational security cooperation** in order to get a better grip on cross-border crime:
- We will strengthen our cooperation by modernizing the Senningen Treaty, taking into account the relevant and significant developments within the EU since 2004. In particular, we will create enhanced possibilities in the field of information sharing, cross-border investigations and cross-border pursuit. Our ministers involved will meet earliest possible, preferably in 2017 or early 2018, with the aim to conclude an updated Senningen Treaty by mid-2018, based on a revised text drafted by the Dutch presidency.
6. We will **intensify our close operational cooperation on tax and social affairs** with the exchange of best practices and follow-up to cross-border suspected fraud cases. In order to do so, we will prepare a recommendation to be concluded during the Belgian presidency in 2018.
7. As founding member states, we are determined to **make a success of the EU with 27 member states**, building on their joint history, common values and achievements:
- We firmly believe that a united EU is of the utmost essence to find responses to our common challenges in the 21st century. Especially if we want the EU to remain to be the source of prosperity and welfare to the benefit of our citizens.
  - The EU is built on respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights. These values are the backbone and the very fundament on which cooperation between member states in the EU is based since its very beginning. We underline the shared responsibility of the member states and the institutions to uphold and promote those values and welcome initiatives to enhance this.
  - 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. To this end, there is a clear need to accelerate the EU's work in areas such as the Single Market, migration, security, EMU, Climate and Energy in the next 18 months in the run up to the European elections in 2019.
8. We therefore **welcome the upcoming discussions in the framework of Leader's Agenda of the president of the European Council**. We recognize the need for a stronger political steering by the European Council to ensure acceleration and delivery within the EU:
- The Benelux countries will actively engage to make a success of the Agenda of the president of the European Council as agreed in October.
  - We underline the importance of close cooperation between Council, Commission and European Parliament to this end, respecting the roles of each institution and thus preserving the Community method as foreseen by the treaties, as well as the equilibrium between interests of all member states. This agenda should go hand in hand with the responsibility of member states for consistent and rigorous implementation and application of the EU acquis.
  - In 2017, we chose a constructive approach with regard to discussions on the EU's future. We expressed our common views, and shared principles on the way ahead. We will continue to discuss the issues that the EU should focus on in the 2019-2024 period, especially with a view to a new strategic agenda of the European Council in 2019.
  - We remain committed to completing and implementing the various single market strategies by 2018, as it was concluded by the European Council, and keep working towards a deeper and fairer single market. Herewith we underline the need for a globally competitive regulatory framework. The Benelux calls on the UK to ensure sufficient progress in the negotiations by

making realistic and concrete proposals which will ensure the confidence needed for further progress and a positive start of the new relationship between the EU and the UK.

- Work continues as well on a stronger Economic and Monetary Union that delivers on stability and growth. Priority should be given to making full use of the existing framework as well as the completion of ongoing initiatives, in particular the Banking Union. The Council *Roadmap to Complete the Banking Union* provides an outline for the completion of the Banking Union. Finally, the declaration of the Social Pillar and further work on the European social agenda are essential for the Benelux countries.
- In 2018, when we celebrate the 60th birthday of the Benelux, we will continue to strive for expanding dialogue and collaboration with other partners in Europe and celebrate our 10 year cooperation with North Rhine-Westphalia and we will focus on reinforcing relations and cross border cooperation with France and French regions. We will continue to hold consultations with other (groups of) member states, underlining their convening role and to enhance and strengthen a concerted, consensual and coordinated response of the EU to the transnational questions of our time.

9. We recognize the need for more EU cooperation on **common foreign and security policy** to be able to confront the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

- We welcome the progress that has been made with the implementation of the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy since last year, especially in the context of strengthening cooperation on security and defense. We welcome the progress made in preparing the permanent structured cooperation (PESCO) as well as the swift establishment of a European Defense Fund.
- We will continue to explore areas where we can reinforce support for external policies within the EU and beyond. Within the framework of the Foreign Affairs Council we have successfully called for conclusions on the external aspects of countering terrorism (June 2017). We welcome further cooperation in this field, including a possible EU external CT strategy, complementing the EU's internal security strategy. This will reinforce the nexus between our internal and external policies. We will continue our joint effort in support of stability and security in Africa, including the support of the newly created G5 Sahel Joint Force.
- We have actively contributed to efforts to promote and support more coherence in the EU's external action, including in the area of human rights. Beyond the Council formation, we also work closely together in the UN Human Rights framework, as demonstrated most recently by our joint efforts as members of the Core Group on a strong Human Rights Council resolution addressing the situation in Yemen. We will continue to look for possibilities to reinforce cooperation between the UN and the EU, especially during the Dutch membership of the UN's Security Council in 2018.
- We will continue to build coalitions and promote dialogue within the EU with all partners, as it has been done with the Visegrád 4, Nordics and Baltics. At the same time, we will continue to promote outreach to partners outside the EU, including through joint visits.