



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL
THE PRESIDENT**



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**Remarks by President of the European Council
Herman Van Rompuy at the press conference
of the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius**

First of all, I wish to express my gratitude to President Dalia Grybauskaite for her hospitality and efforts to make this Vilnius Summit a successful summit.

This was the 3rd Eastern Partnership Summit. And it is with great satisfaction that we had such a high level of participation of leaders from both the European Union and the Eastern partner countries, as well as from our stakeholders. This sends a strong message on the importance we attach to the Eastern Partnership, our commitment and shared ownership. The European Union is a dynamic project. European aspirations and European choice are not vane words.

The European Union believes in close political ties and in the power of shared prosperity because we know the benefits they bring to both sides. This was the starting point when we embarked upon this journey four years ago, at the first Eastern Partnership summit in Prague. All thirty-four countries that have met here today share a geographical and economic space. Only by working closely together can we serve the interests of our citizens.

Today, we welcomed the steps taken since the Warsaw Summit to strengthen the Eastern Partnership, with the objective of building a common area of shared democracy, prosperity, stability and increased interactions and exchanges. We agreed on the importance of continuing to strengthen our ties. Resolving potential conflicts, building trust and nurturing good neighbourly relations is essential to peace, to economic and social development and cooperation in the region.

P R E S S

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Today marks an important milestone in the advancement of our common endeavour. We have finalised the negotiations of the most far-reaching agreements towards political association and economic integration ever conducted by the European Union. This was marked by our initialling with Georgia and Republic of Moldova of Association Agreements, including Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas. We will now jointly work towards a signature of these agreements as soon as possible in the course of next year. This has to become an irreversible project.

We also signed a Visa Facilitation Agreement with Azerbaijan, and a Framework Participation Agreement for participation in EU-led crisis management operations with Georgia. And yesterday we initialled a Common Aviation Area Agreement with Ukraine. We also have an agreement on an Eastern Partnership transport network, with a list of priority projects. And we welcomed the announcement by Belarus that it is ready to start negotiations on a Visa Facilitation Agreement with the European Union, and such an agreements will to the benefits of all its citizens.

We have set ambitious goals to be attained by 2015, ranging from strengthening democracy, human rights and the rule of law, to gradual steps towards visa-free regimes, improving the business climate, cooperation in research and innovation, improving transport networks and increasing people to people contacts. So, the list of deliverables is good and substantial.

Unfortunately, we did not manage on this occasion to sign the Association Agreement including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with Ukraine and to initialise a similar agreement with Armenia. The European Union's position remains clear. The offer of signing the most ambitious agreement the European Union has ever offered to a non-Member State is still on the table. We stand ready to sign with Ukraine once the benchmarks put forward by the European Union are met and we are really close. We may not miss this *rendez-vous* with history later on. We have to set aside short term considerations and we have to overcome pressure from abroad. This is a time of courage, this is a time of decisions.

We will now work on the joint goals that we have agreed upon on the occasion of this summit, and we look forward to our next summit in 2015, where we will review the implementation of our commitments and chart the way ahead in the Eastern Partnership.

Let me conclude by once again thanking President Grybauskaite for her hospitality in the magnificent city of Vilnius, and all the leaders from the Eastern partner countries and from the European Union for a truly stimulating debate during these two days. Thank you.