

Debate with Council President Tusk on putting “Europe first” in 2017

Brexit, EU relations with the US and Russia, migration, economic and social progress, and the defence union were the key political challenges for 2017 debated by MEPs, Commission Vice-President Jyrki Katainen and Council President Donald Tusk on Wednesday. Mr Tusk briefed MEPs on the outcome of the December 2016 meeting of EU heads of state or government.

Click on speakers' names to watch the individual statements

European Council President [Donald Tusk](#) said that progress was being made on curbing migration, but also called on Parliament to support close collaboration on internal and external security issues and on higher defence spending. On Brexit: “Ms May’s speech yesterday proves that our unified position on the single market and four freedoms has finally been understood by London. They should also understand there will be no pick-and-choose”, said Mr Tusk. “We took note of the Prime Minister’s warm words on EU integration”, he added.

European Commission Vice-President [Jyrki Katainen](#) urged that “Unity is more important than ever before” as “we have been challenged from outside but also from within.” He stressed the importance of EU institutions and of the art of compromise in the “post-truth era”, confirming that Commission chief negotiator on Brexit Michel Barnier will cooperate closely with the European Parliament. Mr Katainen also advocated deepening the single market in the field of defence, increasing the number of joint military purchases, helping third countries to fight migrant smugglers, and making EU societies more socially resilient.

[Manfred Weber](#) (EPP, DE) underlined the UK’s contradictory stance on Brexit - leaving the single market while at the same time demanding a free trade deal - and deplored UK threats. “Who will pay for the tax deficits that will result from the dumping plans of the UK government? In the end, ordinary people.” As for the recent statements by US President-elect Donald Trump, Mr Weber said that “We also have powerful tools, like state aid rules. If in the US they say ‘America first’, then we have every right to say ‘Europe first’”, he insisted.

[Péter Niedermüller](#) (S&D, HU) noted that migration is still one of the most serious issues facing the EU. He underlined the tremendous pressure on some member states and demanded support and solidarity from others. In his opinion, member states that fail to show solidarity should “face the consequences”.

[Anna Elżbieta Fotyga](#) (ECR, PL) reported that American troops are arriving in Poland under NATO auspices and called for unity among governments in facing security challenges such as terrorism and Russian aggressiveness.

[Guy Verhofstadt](#) (ALDE, BE) said “We are looking for a fair agreement with the UK not one where being outside the EU is more interesting than being inside.” On US President-Elect Donald Trump’s investiture, he predicted that 20 January would be a turning point - for the EU-US relationship and inside the EU. Europe needs to speed up the building of a Defence Union and invest more in its common border and coast guards.

[João Ferreira](#) (GUE/NGL, PT) pointed out that in the first 15 days of 2017, more than 200 people had drowned in the Mediterranean while trying to reach Europe and complained for the “inhuman reception” given to those who do make it to the EU. On terrorism, he complained that “security” is being used as a pretext to restrict citizens’ rights.

Green group leader [Ska Keller](#) (Greens/EFA, DE) called the Council conclusions “meagre at best”, noting that “We have the Brexit, we have Trump, we have refugees freezing to death in Europe, we have the rise of the far right, the conflicts in our neighbourhood, so many issues to address and solutions to find. (...) I do not expect the Council to save us all, but I do expect a meaningful contribution. We only have one Europe and it needs us”, she concluded.

Migration and security go “hand in hand”, said [Paul Nuttall](#) (EFDD, UK) criticising “dangerous and reckless policies” that “allow jihadists to enter the EU.” This view was echoed by [Vicky Maeijer](#) (ENF, NL), who denounced recent terrorist attacks in Germany and called for “more sovereignty” for member states and “less [EU] diktat”. Mr Nuttall also said the UK should leave the single market to avoid having to pay a “membership fee” or comply with EU rules.

[Mr Tusk](#) thanked MEPs for their clear and broad support for the future common strategy on Brexit - “our unity is an important signal” he said. Asked for an institutional reaction to a recent interview with Mr Trump, Mr Tusk replied that there would be all too many opportunities to react in the future. “It could be our daily work, I’m afraid”, he added.

“Let’s not let others define what Europe is about,” [Mr Katainen](#) replied to comments about Mr Trump and the future of US-EU relations. “Europe’s fate is in our hands”, he said, stressing that EU institutions must represent “common sense” and focus on delivering more prosperous and secure Europe.

Procedure: European Council and Commission statements

#euco #migrationEU, #security, #Russia, #Brexit @JunckerEU @eucopresident

"The world has become a more dangerous place"

Donald Tusk, President of the European Council

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Plenary debate on EU Council outcome and challenges in 2017 with Commissioner Jyrki Katainen and Council President Donald Tusk ©
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