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Ministry for Foreign Affairs

MINISTÈRE DES AFFAIRES
ÉTRANGÈRES
ET DU DÉVELOPPEMENT
INTERNATIONAL

Joint statement of the Ministers for European Affairs of France, Sweden and Germany

3rd Tegel Summit, 11 July 2016

Villa Borsig

The vote of the British people in favour of leaving the EU has been a shock. We, the Ministers for European Affairs of France, Sweden and Germany, deeply regret the result of the 23 June referendum in the UK. Nevertheless, we need to respect the outcome and expect the UK Government to provide clarity on the process as soon as possible.

This creates an unprecedented situation for European integration. We are aware of the fact that the European project is in danger and that we will not overcome this uncertainty by continuing business as usual.

We want to reaffirm our strong commitment to the EU and its integration process. We call for a new spirit of solidarity, unity and trust within the EU. We therefore propose concrete action aimed at tangible results. Our forward-looking agenda for the EU focuses on four challenges: boosting growth and employment, finding sustainable answers to migration and integration, tackling climate change and protecting the EU as a union of values.

We are working on unity but are also aware of the fact that moving forward with successful solutions as a group of pioneering Member States could be an incentive for others to join us and share responsibility.

Boosting Growth and Employment

After many years of crisis and economic hardship, we are noticing a slowly decreasing unemployment rate and an improving economic situation. However, further decisive action is needed and we must ensure that the recent progress is sustainable.

Investment remains a priority for Europe, especially in the fields of energy transition, the digital economy, innovation and research, which are key to developing Europe's growth and jobs potential. We strongly welcome the Juncker Plan, which has already produced widespread positive effects to fill the strategic investments' gap from which Europe suffers in comparison to other global economic players.

Close economic ties are an asset for the Union, but we need to increase our efforts to strengthen economic and social convergence. Further developing the single market, as we intend to do in the digital sector, is a promising track. However, we must not forget the social dimension of the single market. Social convergence and social justice, as important cross-cutting issues for the EU, have to be streamlined more prominently. We welcome the strengthening of the social dimension of the European Semester, also with regard to achieving the goals of the Europe 2020 strategy. The ongoing consultations on the establishment of a European Pillar of Social Rights are another promising step towards achieving our common objective of greater visibility of the EU and its Member States in this field. This is of utmost importance for acceptance by the people. Concrete results will strengthen our credibility as a union of prosperity.

The younger generation has been particularly affected by the crisis and needs to regain hope and prospects for the future. Ambitious steps are required. We need to strengthen European initiatives for advanced training, entrepreneurship and EU-wide access to jobs. The Youth Guarantee, the Youth Employment Initiative and the Erasmus+ Programme for students, apprentices and young professionals are landmark projects which should receive further support. Each young European should have a mobility opportunity in order to experience what European citizenship means. The issue of gender equality is also related to economic growth and competitiveness. Further efforts to promote women's participation in the labour market are important in order to reach the Europe 2020 target on employment.

While protecting free movement of people, action at EU level should contribute to a labour market where the principle of equal pay for equal work applies.

Sustainable Answers to Dealing with Migration and Improving Integration

A joint European answer to the refugee and migration crisis must be a multifaceted one. We need to find sustainable and forward-looking answers. This is a central challenge for the years and decades to come – the EU and its member states must therefore proceed responsibly. Individual Member States will not be able to find sustainable solutions for this transnational challenge single-handedly. Solidarity is essential in this context – benefits and obligations should be divided fairly among the Member States.

We urgently need appropriate solutions – a stable common framework based on European values, and a truly European policy for asylum, migration and refugees. All Member States have a responsibility to contribute to joint solutions based on solidarity. It is our common obligation to protect those who have escaped war and political persecution and live out our highest value of safeguarding human dignity. Every asylum seeker has the right to be treated in compliance with international and European law.

We also need to reinforce control of our common external border and step up the fight against smugglers. The agreement on the European Border and Coast Guard is a very positive step in this regard.

Any European solution must be sustainable, respect human rights and lead to the fair sharing of responsibility among the Member States, taking account of their different capacities. With regard to the external dimension of migration, we must try to mitigate migration pressure by increasing our efforts to tackle the root causes of migration.

This calls for better cooperation in various fields with neighbouring countries of origin and transit. We need active and comprehensive EU engagement with regard to our southern neighbourhood.

Dialogue and cooperation between Member States is necessary to prepare the ground for a rational and objective debate. We should primarily but not exclusively focus on those elements of a comprehensive answer which unite rather than divide us in Europe. Dialogue and mutual understanding are key in this regard. In European societies which are values-based, open and inclusive, migration should be understood primarily as an opportunity – notably in shrinking societies. Our three countries have had many positive experiences with immigration and are ready to intensify our exchange with other Member States on integration.

Tackling Climate Change

We are concerned that climate change presents a global threat to stability, security and economic welfare worldwide. We need to address this challenge and will actively work to promote the implementation of the 2016 EU Climate Diplomacy Action Plan. The implementation of the historic Paris Agreement is now a priority on our countries' political agenda: our three countries will take all necessary steps to ratify the Agreement as soon as possible. We call upon all other Member States to do the same so as to enable the European Union and its Member States to be parties of its entry into force. In this context, it is important that the EU swiftly translates its 2030 climate and energy framework into concrete legislation while maintaining high climate ambition. The EU's emissions trading scheme is part of our commitment in this regard.

Externally, our three countries are committed to supporting climate adaptation and mitigation in developing countries, and we remain committed to providing substantial climate funding for this purpose. Also, our three countries stand ready to assist developing countries in realising their Paris climate goals through the new partnership on Nationally Determined Contributions.

Protecting Values and the Rule of Law

Respect for common values and the rule of law are fundamental principles of the EU. The EU is much more than a single market. It is first and foremost a union of universal values. Our Union, as a global promotor of its shared values, must ensure that these values are protected internally. Furthermore, it is our belief that living out our values – democracy, the rule of law, fundamental rights, freedom and protection of minority rights – will help promote common European solutions in other policy fields.

The European Commission and the Council of the EU have developed instruments to deal with rule-of-law-related issues. We need to strengthen these and use them as a framework for constructive and proactive dialogue. We reaffirm our commitment to contribute further to the mechanism established in the framework of the General Affairs Council now that the dialogue has taken place twice.