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Your Excellency,

In view of the upcoming meeting of the European Council, let me share with you some of my thoughts regarding the future of Schengen. The European Union is currently facing one of the most difficult challenges in its history. The migration and refugee crisis has forced many Member States to temporarily reintroduce controls at internal borders. Schengen – one of the major achievements of European integration – is at stake. Politicians that have until recently been living in the darker corners of our democracies are feeding off fear and uncertainty many of our citizens feel. We must act quickly and decisively to calm these fears and do our utmost to renew the faith of our people in Europe and the European Union that has been successfully guaranteeing peace and prosperity on our continent since its establishment.

There is no doubt that Schengen is one of the cornerstones of the European integration project. Thanks to Schengen, hundreds of millions of Europeans enjoy tangible benefits of moving freely across the Continent without being subjected to border checks. Furthermore, Schengen has countless positive economic effects facilitating growth, employment and entrepreneurship. It brings significant advantages in terms of the European Union internal market functioning as well as facilitation of easy people to people contacts. But above all, Schengen represents the most successful area of freedom, security and justice in the world. Losing this “flagship” of the European Union would very much equal to losing the Union at the same time in the minds of many Europeans that are already doubtful about Europe and our future. Europeans would instead rally to the nationalistic or even xenophobic cries of false prophets.

Courtesy translation

A common European approach is required to maintain the functioning of Schengen. The current situation clearly shows that Schengen can only function if its rules and principles are fully implemented by all parties involved. Unfortunately, this has not been the case so far in some areas. Such situation risks undermining the already fraying public confidence in Schengen and putting the whole European integration project in question.

A common resolute and united action is, therefore, needed to improve, support and preserve Schengen and thus to reinvigorate our common European vision. Vis-à-vis the current state of affairs, the European Union must first address the root causes of the doubts of our citizens. This means, above all, making sure the European Union and the Schengen external border is effectively protected. The legislative proposals by the European Commission will represent an important basis for discussion in this respect.

The discussion of Ministers of Interior at the December meeting of Justice and Home Affairs Council demonstrated that the commitment to preserve Schengen and to protect our external border in an effective manner is fully shared by all of us. Therefore, I truly believe that we all will now – as genuine friends of Schengen – work together on the application of the current acquis and strive towards a rapid implementation of the key further measures strengthening the external border. For this effort to be successful, we should continue providing practical support to European Union Member States as well as to countries outside of the European Union who are under significant migratory pressure.

Our common endeavour to preserve Schengen and strengthen our external border should in the coming weeks focus especially on the following priorities:

- Full and efficient use of Frontex, including providing all the necessary personal and material resources and strengthening Frontex in relevant areas as well as a productive and swift discussion on the mandate, parameters and rules for launching the European Border and Coast Guard system;
- Result-oriented revision of the Schengen Borders Code which would provide an effective framework for managing cross-border movement, including thorough checks on persons enjoying the right of free movement at EU external borders;
- Swift work on “Smart Borders” concept including a proposal for Entry/Exit System;
- Implementation of the relevant frameworks of cooperation with Turkey and African countries and enhancing our cooperation with and assistance to the countries along the Western Balkans migration route.

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Despite the fact that finding common ground on all technical and political details of these elements may not be easy, as friends of Schengen we must stand up to our common responsibility to look for what unites us and to reach an agreement that will ensure the bright future of Schengen.

We should make good use of the recent discussions among the Member States at different levels to advance substantially in assuming control over Schengen and its borders. In this respect we must use the opportunity to ensure good prospects for Schengen during the forthcoming European Council. I will therefore do my utmost for our December meeting to send a clear message of our shared commitment for the future of Schengen and to provide common ground and the necessary political guidance for further steps. I would very much like to invite you to join me in this effort.

I am looking forward to our discussion.

Yours sincerely,