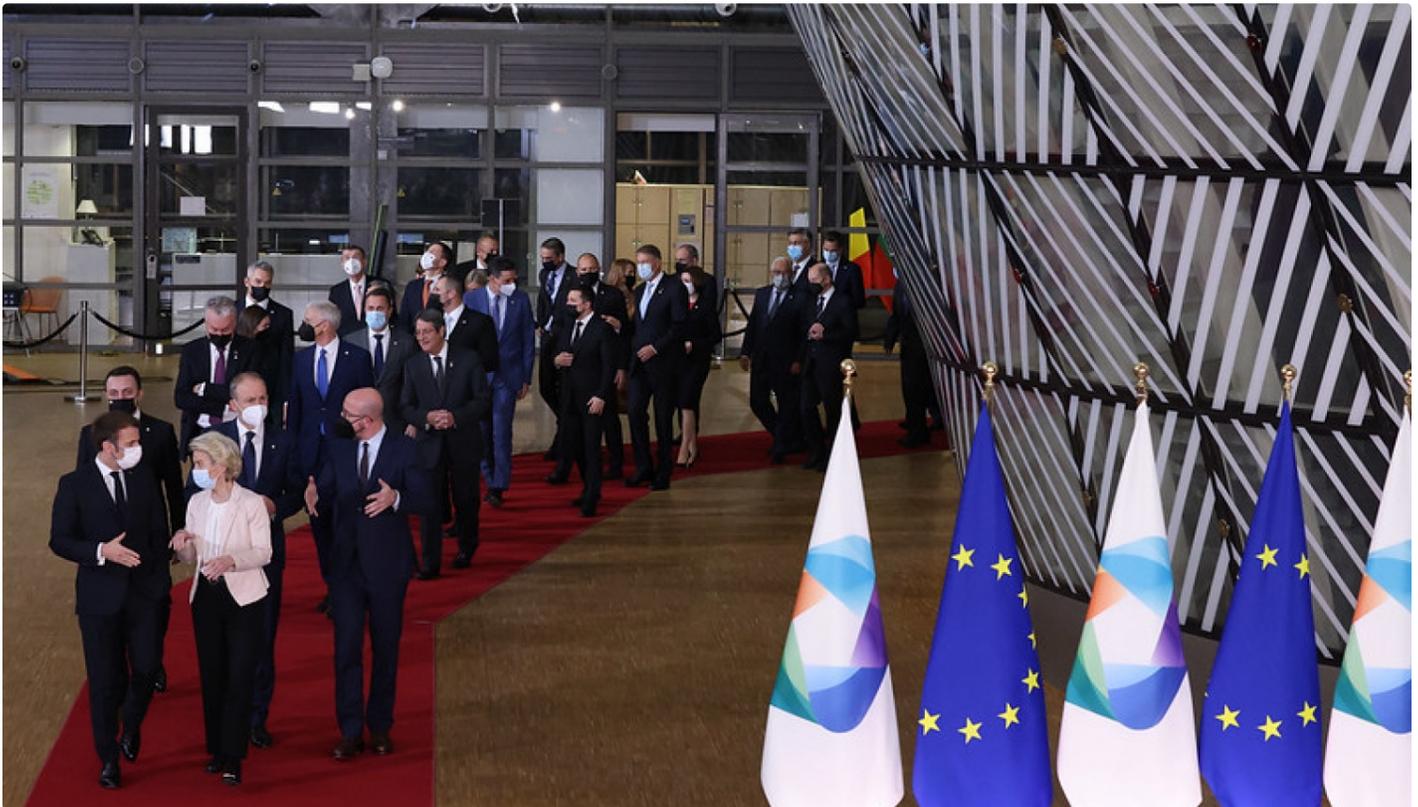


Kariņš: The EU sends a strong signal to Russia to avoid escalation of the situation in relations with Ukraine

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On Thursday 16 December, Prime Minister Krišjānis Kariņš participated in the European Council meeting of the Heads of State and Government of the European Union (EU) in Brussels, where the officials addressed a wide range of issues.

After the European Council, the Prime Minister emphasized that an important agreement had been reached at the meeting - a strong EU response, incl. sanctions that are coordinated with partners, is expected in the event of Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

☞ "Security was one of the main topics of discussion. I am delighted that the European Union has made a joint and clear decision that we will work together with our partners, and in case of military escalation of the situation by Russia in its relations with Ukraine, there will be grave economic sanctions and consequences. This is very important because, in fact, the Western world, the EU and NATO, we all work and will work together. Russia's actions have not divided Europe, but united it," said K. Kariņš.

As regards the situation in Belarus, the EU leaders agreed that the latest rulings of the Belarusian court against members of the political opposition again demonstrated the undemocratic nature of the regime. The officials also discussed the hybrid operation by Belarus at the EU borders. The Prime Minister expressed gratitude to the EU institutions and Member States for the support provided to date, and pointed out the need to review the EU regulatory framework to ensure that the Member States' border guards have the necessary rights and means to ensure the protection of the EU's borders in the event of such hybrid attacks.

In the context of the COVID-19 situation in Europe, the EU leaders highlighted the need for the Member States to work on ensuring booster vaccination against Covid-19, especially in the light of the rapid spread of the Omicron variant. K. Kariņš also stressed the importance of booster vaccination in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. The leaders agreed on the need to set a common validity period for vaccination certificates within the European Union. It is expected that the European Commission will make a decision (discussed in advance with the Member States) that will set the exact period of validity of vaccination certificates at the beginning of next year.

With regard to the rise in energy prices, the leaders agreed on the need to continue discussions on long-term solutions at the EU level. According to the Prime Minister, in the short term, the Member States shall take the decisions on national-level solutions to ease the situation for citizens and businesses with high electricity bills, with a particular focus on the support for vulnerable groups.

During the discussions on the future of the EU security policy, K. Kariņš stressed the need to balance ambitions with available resources and funding. It is now crucial to work on the EU-NATO cooperation. A reinforced political dialogue between the EU and NATO at expert and senior level is essential to promote a common vision of security and defence challenges. In particular, we support stronger EU-NATO cooperation in the areas of military mobility and resilience, countering disinformation and hybrid threats.

We have already reported that the Prime Minister participated in the sixth Eastern Partnership Summit held on Wednesday 15 December in Brussels that brought together the leaders of the EU and partner countries - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The aim of the summit is to demonstrate that this partnership is rooted in shared values, unity and solidarity.

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