



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL
THE PRESIDENT**



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Opening remarks by President Herman Van Rompuy at the European Council

Since it is a tradition by now, I should like to start by welcoming our newest colleague, Xavier Bettel, Prime minister of Luxembourg. Welcome !

Speaking of traditions, December is always a good time to look back. 2013 has been a year of progress. Hard work is starting to pay off. I know it is not politically correct to be positive. But: growth is back, now and for next year. Yes unemployment is still too high, but stopped rising in most countries and it will go down. Ireland and Spain just said goodbye to their support programmes. And Latvia is joining the Eurozone. In fact, their very first euro coins are right in front of you. Freshly minted! Thank you, Valdis, and congratulations to your country!

But this afternoon, our first topic is defence and its economic aspects. In a few minutes, we'll be joined by the Secretary-General of NATO, Anders Fogh Rasmussen.

We will also discuss the completion of our Economic and Monetary Union to guarantee the eurozone remains strong and stable in the future. We set out a roadmap. We are implementing it step by step.

Christmas is a time of hope. We owe that prospect to our citizens. So, colleagues, let's start!

P R E S S

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