

Funding of European political parties: revised rules get Council approval

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On 7 March 2018, EU ambassadors endorsed an agreement reached with the European Parliament on a targeted revision of the rules for the funding of European political parties. This paves the way for the final adoption of the new rules by the Council, once the deal has been voted in the Parliament.

The revised rules close certain loopholes which have allowed the objectives of the current regulation to be circumvented. They will strengthen the European dimension of European political parties, ensure a fairer distribution of funds and beef up enforcement.

The Council and the Parliament reached an agreement on the changes on 27 February. The co-legislators are working rapidly to ensure that the new rules are in place before 30 June, when the European political parties can start applying for funding in the financial year 2019.

The positions of the Council and the Parliament were close on this file, which has allowed us to come quickly to an agreement. We want to put an end to abuses, ensure more fairness in funding and increase transparency ahead of next year's EP elections.

Monika Panayotova, Deputy Minister for the Bulgarian Presidency of the EU Council

Money for genuine parties and activities at European level

European political parties are political alliances registered under EU law. They can have national and regional parties, as well as individuals, as members and they have to be represented in at least a quarter of the member states. The EU treaty recognises their role in "forming European political awareness and expressing the will of citizens of the Union". The EU funding is intended to help them finance their activities at European level and their campaign in the EP elections.

The revision of the current rules is aimed at ensuring that these objectives

are achieved in practice and that the EU funds are properly used. It is a response to certain abusive practices, such as the creation of European political parties sponsored by a narrow group of parties and individuals with the prime purpose of receiving EU funds.

Revised conditions for registration

One of the main changes is a revision of the **conditions for the registration** of European political parties. The Council and the European Parliament have agreed that in future only parties – and no longer individuals – can sponsor the creation of European political parties. Sponsorship of several European parties is prohibited.

This will put an end to multiparty memberships and the creation of pseudo-parties which are sponsored mainly by individual members. It is intended to make sure that European political parties have a genuine pan-European dimension.

The **funding** of European political parties will also become **more proportional** to their support at the European elections. The amount distributed in proportion to their share of MEPs is increased from 85% to 90%.

This will further discourage the creation of European political parties mainly for the purpose of receiving EU money, as the fixed amount is reduced from 15% to 10%.

Easier access and stronger enforcement

The new rules will also make it easier for parties and foundations to access EU funds by **lowering the co-financing requirement**. It will decrease from 15% to 10% for the European political parties and 5% for the European political foundations, enabling more public funding for their activities.

This change recognises the difficulties the parties and foundations have encountered in meeting the current threshold. It will mitigate the risk that they would use dubious financial practices to reach the required level of own resources.

Other changes are aimed at **better protecting the EU's financial interests** in case of fraud. The EP has not been able to recover funds from some parties and foundations which have gone bankrupt. The new rules allow for recovery from natural persons in certain cases, if they are responsible for the infringement. The European Public Prosecutor's office is called on to investigate alleged abuses in the future.

The conditions for de-registering parties are also set out in more detail, which will simplify and speed up the process.

Finally, the new rules will also **increase transparency** for the citizens. Parties in the EU member states will have to display on their websites the logo and the programme of the European political parties to which they are affiliated for the European parties to be able to receive EU funding.

The links between European political parties and their member parties will thus become more visible for the citizens ahead of the 2019 EP elections.

Next steps and transition to the new regime

The new rules will now have to be voted in the Parliament's constitutional affairs committee and in plenary. The Council is then expected to adopt them in the coming weeks.

Once the amendments have entered into force, current European political parties will have two months to provide evidence that they continue to satisfy the conditions for registration. If they fail to do so, they and their affiliated foundations will be removed from the register.

This will not affect the funding for the budget year 2018. However, in order to receive EU funds in 2019, the parties and foundations will have to comply with the new rules.

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[EASO Publishes Practical Guide on Age Assessment](#)

Following the publication of the [‘EASO age assessment practice in Europe’ in 2013](#), a new EASO Practical Guide provides updated guidance, key recommendations and tools on the implementation of the best interests of the child when assessing the age of a person from a multidisciplinary and holistic approach. It also provides up-to-date information on the methods conducted by EU+ states and on new methods to be explored.

Age assessment remains a complex process with potential far-reaching consequences for applicants undergoing the assessment. Age assessment methods and processes differ across EU Member States and reliable multidisciplinary and rights-compliant age assessment processes are not always guaranteed. To support national authorities in the safeguarding of the principle of the best interests of the child, the Practical Guide:

- analyses the impact of age assessment on the applicant and the motivation for such an assessment;
- offers guidance on the application of the necessary safeguards in the assessment process;
- describes how to implement the assessment process using a holistic and multidisciplinary approach;
- provides a model for a workflow highlighting a gradual process and use of methods to prevent unnecessary examinations;
- explores new methods used to assess an applicant's age, the latest

developments in the methods already in use and the potential impact of each method on the rights of the applicant;

- provides key recommendations to address practical challenges that might appear prior to, after and at different stages of the process;
- contains a set of tools and reference documents to complement the information provided in the practical guide, including a glossary, a compilation of legal framework and policy-guidance documents, practical tools for ensuring the best interests of the child, and an updated overview of the methods and procedural safeguards in use in the EU+ territory.

While this publication addresses age assessment for the specific purpose of international protection procedures, it may also serve as a useful reference in other contexts where age assessment is required (migrant children, minimum age of criminal responsibility, etc.).

This publication was developed by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) in consultation with experts from EU+ states, the European Commission, EU agencies and international and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The diverse profiles of experts involved, including social workers, forensic anthropologists and radiology researchers, as well as policy officers and reception officers, ensures that the publication reflects a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach.

The Practical Guide on Age Assessment is available on the [EASO website](#).

Any further information may be obtained from the European Asylum Support Office on the following email address: press@easo.europa.eu

[Speakings by Commissioner Thyssen on the 2018 European Semester Country Reports](#)

Ladies and gentlemen,

This year's European Semester cycle is a landmark.

You know that we proclaimed the European Pillar of Social Rights at the Social Summit a few months ago. This Pillar is our joint political commitment – by the Commission, by the Parliament, by the Council – to move forward with a stronger social Europe. We need to tackle longer-term causes of change, such as new forms of work and demographic ageing. The success of the Pillar

depends on the extent to which we implement it. And this has to be done both at European level and national level.

How do we want to achieve this?

The Semester is our key instrument to steer social reforms in the Member States. Building on the European Pillar of Social Rights, we focus on reforms aimed at better living and working conditions for our citizens. Reforms that make labour markets more resilient and national welfare systems more effective. Our new social scoreboard helps us to monitor and implement the Pillar and social reforms, using a range of statistical indicators. The scoreboard looks at unemployment and employment rates, disposable household income and income inequality. But we also look at early school leavers, how women compare to men in the labour market and the impact of public policies on poverty, among other indicators. This Scoreboard is now an important part of the Semester. We've used it in the country-specific reports presented today. And frankly, our country specific reports have never been so social. They will also underpin the Country-Specific Recommendations that we will present in May.

Now what is the state of play today?

With more than 236 million people in jobs, employment continues to reach record highs. Unemployment is almost back to pre-crisis levels, standing at 7.7% in the EU, the average of the last quarter of 2017. And it continues to fall among young and long-term unemployed. But there are still challenges: unemployment, youth unemployment and long-term unemployment are still very high in some countries. While the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion is declining, it is still high. In some countries household income is still less than in 2008, when the crisis started.

Broadly speaking, however, all Member States made progress in addressing last year's recommendations in the employment and social fields. Although some countries could and should have made more efforts. With high growth, we have a golden opportunity for reforms. I call on Member States to take this opportunity. Now is the time for reform. We should repair the roof when the sun is shining. Good social dialogue is key to this. Involving social partners in defining and implementing reforms increases their legitimacy, quality and also effectiveness of these reforms. In some Member States we still observe a scope for improvement in this respect.

As to the necessary reforms:

(1) High unemployment in some Member States, especially among the young, remains a key concern. Also the employment rate of older workers, women and migrants are points for attention. Many countries are, in a context of demographic change, taking decisive actions in these fields.

(2) With growth back in Europe, we see the trend of increasing divisions in the labour market – such as differences between temporary and permanent contracts- coming to a halt. But wages are not increasing as much as the current situation would call for. This is something the Commission is

following closely. When our competitive position is fragile, often during a crisis, we need to be cautious about wage increases. But we also point out when there is more scope for higher wages – by and large now is the moment.

(3) Our societies are changing rapidly and the skills needs on the labour market are changing ever faster. The right education and training are the key to equal opportunities. They are indispensable to get a job in the first place – essential for keeping your skills up to date, and crucial if you need a new job. In Denmark for example a broad education reform is already underway to improve school outcomes and raise academic standards.

(4) Our social protection systems will also need to adapt to the changing society. More flexibility in the workplace must go hand in hand with more security. We have to ensure that everybody, whatever their employment status, contributes and is covered by social protection. We need to be aware of these risks, and adjust our systems in a comprehensive way. Next week I will present a proposal to address this.

Several Member States are already starting to address this problem. France, Lithuania, Poland and Portugal are extending access to social safety nets to people in non-standard and self-employed situations. In Sweden, the self-employed can now complement their unemployment insurance with a state-subsidised top-up. And I would also signal that finally both Greece and Italy, the 2 last countries, have introduced minimum income schemes, which is the safety net of last resort.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Solidarity and fairness are founding values of the European project, and also enshrined in the European Pillar of Social Rights. We know that they strengthen sustainable growth. For our social market economy to flourish, economic and social development need to go hand in hand. The Pillar will continue to guide us on this path. Thank you.

[Statement by President Donald Tusk on the draft guidelines on the framework for the future relationship with the UK](#)

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Good afternoon. I am very happy to be back in Luxembourg. And very happy to be here with my colleague and good friend, Prime Minister Bettel, to discuss the agenda of the March European Council.

Two hours ago, I sent the EU27 Member States my draft guidelines for our relations with the UK after Brexit. I'm here in Luxembourg to consult the Prime Minister on these guidelines that I hope will be adopted at our European Council in March. It is not a coincidence that once again I start my consultations ahead of a European Council meeting here in Luxembourg with Prime Minister Bettel. I really value your advice – always very constructive and responsible.

My proposal shows that we don't want to build a wall between the EU and Britain. On the contrary, the UK will be our closest neighbour and we want to remain friends and partners also after Brexit. Partners that are as close as possible, just like we have said from the very first day after the referendum.

And, in this spirit, I propose close cooperation within the following areas.

Firstly, as we are confronted with similar security threats, I propose that the EU and the UK continue our common fight against terrorism and international crime. The increasing global instability requires our uninterrupted cooperation in defence and foreign affairs. It is about the security of our citizens, which must be preserved beyond Brexit.

Secondly, we invite the UK to participate in EU programmes in the fields of research and innovation, as well as in education and culture. This is key to maintain mutually beneficial and enriching personal networks in these vital areas, and for our community of values to prosper also in future.

Thirdly, I am determined to avoid that particularly absurd consequence of Brexit that is the disruption of flights between the UK and the EU. To do so, we must start discussions on this issue as soon as possible.

Now, coming to the core of our future economic relationship. During my talks in London last Thursday, and in her speech last Friday, Prime Minister Theresa May confirmed that the UK will leave the Single Market, leave the customs union and leave the jurisdiction of the ECJ (European Court of Justice). Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the only remaining possible model is a free trade agreement. I hope that it will be ambitious and advanced – and we will do our best, as we did with other partners, such as Canada recently – but anyway it will only be a trade agreement.

I propose that we aim for a trade agreement covering all sectors and with zero tariffs on goods. Like other free trade agreements, it should address services. And in fisheries, reciprocal access to fishing waters and resources should be maintained.

This positive approach doesn't change the simple fact that because of Brexit we will be drifting apart. In fact, this will be the first FTA in history that loosens economic ties, instead of strengthening them. Our agreement will not make trade between the UK and the EU frictionless or smoother. It will make it more complicated and costly than today, for all of us. This is the essence of Brexit.

To sum up, we will enter the negotiations of the future relations with the UK with an open, positive and constructive mind, but also with realism. From my point of view, the outcome of the negotiations must pass two key tests:

- the test of balance of rights and obligations. For example, the EU cannot agree to grant the UK the rights of Norway with the obligations of Canada;
- the test of integrity of the Single Market. No Member State is free to pick only those sectors of the Single Market it likes, nor to accept the role of the ECJ only when it suits their interest. By the same token, a pick-and-mix approach for a non-member state is out of the question. We are not going to sacrifice these principles. It's simply not in our interest.

Finally, a few words about another topic of the March summit. Following the announcement of President Trump, there is a risk of a serious trade dispute between the United States and the rest of the world, including the EU. President Trump has recently said, and I quote: 'trade wars are good, and easy to win'. But the truth is quite the opposite: trade wars are bad, and easy to lose. For this reason, I strongly believe that now is the time for politicians on both sides of the Atlantic to act responsibly.

Given that President Trump's announcement may have repercussions for our citizens and European businesses, not to mention the global economy, I will propose that the EU leaders have an extraordinary trade debate at the upcoming summit. We should have a clear objective in mind: to keep world trade alive. And, if necessary, to protect Europeans against trade turbulence, including by proportionate responses in accordance with the WTO. Thank you.

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Company and director sentenced after scaffolder seriously injured

A scaffolding company and its managing director have today been sentenced after one of its scaffolders suffered a serious injury whilst taking down a scaffold.

Brighton Magistrates' Court heard how LS Scaffolding was contracted to erect

a scaffold and temporary roof over a pair of houses to enable the conversion of the lofts. While dismantling the roof of the structure at the site on Upton Court Road, Slough, a worker fell and broke his femur.

An investigation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) into the incident, that occurred on 28 July 2016, found that LS Scaffolding Ltd regularly used untrained workers and failed to ensure scaffold structures were designed by competent persons. The investigation also found that the company and its director failed to ensure the work on a complex scaffold was properly planned, supervised or carried out.

LS Scaffolding Ltd of Vicarage Farm Road, Hounslow pleaded guilty to breaching Regulations 4 (1) and 8(b) (ii) of The Work at Height Regulations 2005. The company was fined £47,000 and ordered to pay costs of £7,371 with a £170 surcharge.

Lakhbir Khakh, director of LS Scaffolding Ltd of Stanwell Gardens, Staines pleaded guilty to breaching two counts of Section 37 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and was sentenced to 18 weeks custodial sentence suspended for 12 months and was fined £1,700 with a £115 surcharge.

After the hearing, HSE inspector Dominic Goacher commented: "It is essential that scaffolding companies ensure that non-standard scaffolds are safely erected to a design produced by a competent scaffold engineer and that safe systems of work are planned and used by competent workers."

Notes to Editors:

1. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety. We prevent work-related death, injury and ill health through regulatory actions that range from influencing behaviours across whole industry sectors through to targeted interventions on individual businesses. These activities are supported by globally recognised scientific expertise. hse.gov.uk
2. More about the legislation referred to in this case can be found at: legislation.gov.uk/
3. HSE news releases are available at <http://press.hse.gov.uk>

Journalists should approach HSE press office with any queries on regional press releases.