

# Remarks by President Donald Tusk after his meeting with Prime Minister of New Zealand Jacinda Ardern

## Preben Aamann

European Council President Spokesperson  
+32 2 281 51 50  
+32 476 85 05 43

I would like to start by warmly welcoming you in Brussels on your first visit to the European Union, our Institution.

Relations between the European Union and New Zealand are excellent. Geographically we are far apart, but politically and economically we are close partners and friends. We both stand by the values of liberal democracy, human rights and the rule of law. We both firmly believe in openness, cooperation, the rules-based international order and free trade.

We are currently negotiating an ambitious and comprehensive trade agreement between the European Union and New Zealand. This has enormous strategic importance for the rules-based international order, at a time when some are questioning it. We are sending a clear message that we stand together against protectionism. Our negotiators will work at an ambitious speed to reach the best outcome for our citizens and companies.

Beyond trade, we agreed to work together even more closely in many areas, from peace and security, to connectivity, energy and climate change. There is no doubt that both the EU and New Zealand have been leaders of the transition to a low-carbon economy. And we will continue to pursue ambitious climate action. Our budgets reflect the shared understanding that for many, including in the Pacific region, the threats from rising sea levels are existential.

Before I conclude, let me borrow from the Māori wisdom and say: *let us keep close together, not far apart*. In the current uncertain global environment, the friendship between the European Union and New Zealand is priceless. Thank you.

[Download as pdf](#)

---

## 75 countries launch WTO talks on e-commerce

Commissioner for Trade Cecilia **Malmström** said: *"It is encouraging to see so many partners joining this important trade initiative. Electronic commerce is a reality in most corners of the world, so we owe it to our citizens and companies to provide a predictable, effective and safe online environment for trade. We look forward to working with all interested WTO members, flexibly and pragmatically, to create a truly comprehensive and ambitious set of rules."*

The last two decades have seen the exponential growth of domestic and cross-border electronic commerce. Despite this fast increase in electronic transactions, there are no specific multilateral rules in the WTO regulating this type of trade. Business and consumers instead have to rely on a patchwork of rules agreed by some countries in their bilateral or regional trade agreements.

WTO rules on e-commerce will aim to enhance opportunities and address challenges of e-commerce in both developed and developing countries. The negotiations should result in a multilateral legal framework that consumers and businesses, especially smaller ones, could rely on to make it easier and safer to buy, sell and do business online. The new rules would for instance:

- improve consumers' **trust** in the on-line environment and combat **spam**
- tackle **barriers** that prevent cross-border sales
- guarantee validity of **e-contracts** and **e-signatures**
- permanently ban customs duties on **electronic transmissions**
- address forced **data localisation requirements** and forced **disclosure of source code**

The launch of these negotiations shows the WTO stays in the centre of international rule making and continues to be a platform where groups of interested countries agree to work together to develop new rules in an open and inclusive manner. The negotiating process planned to start in March 2019 is open to other WTO members who may still be interested to join.

---

## Spain: EIB and ICO create an investment platform for mid-caps to mobilise financing of up to EUR 1.12bn

- The agreement will enable ICO to expand its lending capacity for mid-

**caps**

- **The EUR 200m guaranteed by the EIB under a risk sharing facility has Juncker Plan support**
- **Impact on jobs: the platform is expected to benefit companies employing almost 26 000 people**

The European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Instituto de Crédito Oficial (ICO) are joining forces to mobilise up to EUR 1.12bn in financing for Spanish mid-caps (companies with between 250 and 3 000 employees). To this end, EIB Vice-President Emma Navarro and ICO Chairman José Carlos García de Quevedo signed an agreement today in Madrid enabling the creation of a specific investment platform for these mid-cap companies via a risk sharing facility. The platform will mobilise private capital through syndicated loan agreements with financial intermediaries.

In concrete terms, the EIB will take on the risk of a portfolio of up to EUR 400m generated by ICO together with the commercial banking sector, which will provide at least 50% of the financing. This means that the financing volume provided for mid-caps via this agreement will total EUR 800m. Added to this is the contribution from the mid-caps themselves, which brings the expected total mobilised financing to EUR 1.12bn. This EIB risk sharing guarantee was signed under the [Investment Plan for Europe](#). Juncker Plan support makes it possible to take on higher risks and improve the financing conditions offered to mid-caps, which will have access to longer maturity periods for developing their investments. The companies benefiting from this risk guarantee will be able to receive between EUR 8m and EUR 12m from ICO.

The aim of the agreement is to help provide Spanish mid-caps with access to the necessary resources to become innovation and sustainability leaders, enabling them to continue to grow and create jobs. The EIB calculates that the businesses able to benefit from this investment platform employ a total of 26 000 people.

At the signing ceremony in Madrid, **EIB Vice-President Emma Navarro** said: *"This new investment platform is an excellent example of how the EIB-ICO partnership, with Juncker Plan support, is making it possible to develop innovative financial instruments able to drive economic growth by mobilising private investment. We are delighted to be signing a very positive agreement for the financing of mid-caps, which are essential vehicles for job creation and to boost the production capacity of the Spanish economy."*

**European Commission Vice-President Jyrki Katainen**, responsible for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness, said: *"Thanks to this investment platform, Spanish medium-sized businesses will get the funding they need to grow and create jobs in the country. Raising investment to boost employment in Spain and throughout Europe has always been at the heart of the Investment Plan. I congratulate Spain on being among its top beneficiaries with over €46 billion of additional investments mobilised."*

**ICO Chairman José Carlos García de Quevedo** added: *"This agreement once again highlights the importance of the partnership between our institutions and strengthens ICO's role as a catalyst for EU funds, with the aim of driving*

the growth of Spanish businesses by helping to create and structure varied sources of financing.”

---

## [Work-Life Balance: Commission welcomes the provisional agreement reached today](#)

Today, the European Parliament and the Council reached a provisional agreement on the European Commission’s proposal for [a new Directive on work-life balance for parents and carers](#). First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans**, Commissioners Marianne **Thyssen** and Věra **Jourová** welcomed the agreement with the following statement:

*“The provisional agreement reached by the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission today is good news for families in Europe. The European Pillar of Social Rights is about improving the daily lives of Europeans. Today’s provisional agreement makes this vision very concrete, giving families with working parents and carers a real choice on how to combine their work and family life. This is a huge step towards a more social Europe and shows the true spirit of the Pillar.*

*New work-life balance rules that are fit for purpose in the 21st century will open up opportunities for working women and men to share caring responsibilities, for children and relatives, on an equal basis. Today’s agreement sets a European minimum standard of 10 days of paternity leave for fathers following the birth of their child, to be compensated at the level of sick pay. It strengthens the existing right to 4 months of parental leave, by making 2 months non-transferable between parents and introducing compensation for these 2 months at a level to be determined by the Member States. We also agreed on European provisions for carer’s leave by attributing 5 days per worker per year, as a new European entitlement for workers. Last but not least, the new rules strengthen the right for all parents and carers to request flexible working arrangements.*

*But this is not only about strengthening the rights of individuals. The new rules are a model for how to align social and economic priorities. Businesses will be able to attract and retain talented women and men. The European economy will gain from this proposal, which will contribute to closing the gender employment gap. Better work-life balance for both women and men is not only the fair, but also the smart thing to do.”*

### **Next steps**

This provisional agreement now has to be formally adopted by both the European Parliament and the Council.

## Background

To address the challenges that working parents and carers face in reconciling work and family responsibilities, the European Commission proposed the 'Work-life Balance' Initiative in April 2017. This initiative is a key deliverable of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#).

The Directive on work-life balance sets a number of new or higher standards for parental, paternity and carer's leave, and the right to request flexible working arrangements. It takes account of the needs of small and medium-sized companies and makes sure that they are not disproportionately affected. The new Directive is complemented with policy and funding measures, supporting Member States in enforcing existing dismissal protection legislation, developing formal care services and addressing economic disincentives for second earners to work.

### For more information

[Press release: Delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights – Commission adopts first concrete initiatives](#)

[Factsheet: A new start to support work-life balance for parents and carers](#)

[Work Life Balance Eurobarometer](#)

[Factsheet: Social Priorities under the Juncker Commission](#)

---

## [Better work-life balance for EU citizens: Presidency reaches provisional agreement with the European Parliament](#)

Your request will be handled by the Press Office of the General Secretariat of the Council in accordance with the provisions of Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by the Community institutions and bodies and on the free movement of such data.

Your data will be stored in the database until you unsubscribe from the service.

Certain data (name, e-mail address, preferred language, media name, media type) may be disclosed to the press offices of the European institutions, the Permanent Representations of the Member States and to European Union

agencies, under the conditions laid down in Articles 7 and 8 of Regulation 45/2001.

If there is data which you would not like to be stored, please let us know at: [\[email protected\]](#)