

Letter of congratulations from President Donald Tusk to Xavier Bettel on his reappointment as Prime Minister of Luxembourg

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Provisional agreement reached on EU budget for 2019

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On 4 December 2018, the Austrian presidency and the European Parliament reached a provisional agreement on the EU budget for 2019.

This paves the way for the adoption of the budget before the end of the year, if the deal is backed by member states in the Council and the EP plenary next week.

Under the agreement, the total commitments in the 2019 EU budget are set at €165.8 billion and payments at €148.2 billion. This is an increase of 3.17% in commitments and 2.37% in payments compared to 2018.

I am glad to announce an agreement on a budget for 2019 which strongly reflects the priorities of the Council and the Parliament – growth and jobs, young people, security and migration. We have boosted support for the EU's flagship programmes, while ensuring good value for money and room for manoeuvre to cater for unexpected needs.

Hartwig Löger, minister for finance of Austria and chief Council negotiator for the 2019 EU budget

Some elements of the agreement are as follows:

- Commitments of €23.3 billion (+6.07% compared to 2018) were agreed to support growth and job creation under subheading 1a (competitiveness for growth and jobs). This includes more funds for research and innovation (Horizon 2020, €12.3 billion), infrastructure projects (Connecting Europe Facility, €3.8 billion), youth exchanges (Erasmus+, €2.8 billion) and small and medium-sized enterprises (COSME, €0.4 billion).
- The Youth Employment Initiative receives an additional €350 million to help improve young people's chances of getting a job.
- In the field of migration and security, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund gets a strong boost, with €1.1 billion (+55.85% compared to 2018) allocated to migration management. The Internal Security Fund will receive €533.5 million. Additional funds are provided for several agencies in charge of responding to the current migration and security challenges.
- The 2019 EU budget will contribute €1.45 billion to the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey. This is in line with the agreement reached between the member states on how to finance an additional €3 billion for the facility to support Syrian refugees.
- Pre-accession funds to Turkey have been cut by €146.7 million compared to the financial programming in view of the situation in Turkey as regards democracy, rule of law, human rights and press freedom.

Headings	2019 EU budget (in € billion)	
	Commitments	Payments
1. Smart and inclusive growth	80.527	67.557
– 1a. Competitiveness for growth and jobs	23.335	20.522

– 1b. Economic, social and territorial cohesion	57.192	47.035
2. Sustainable growth: natural resources	59.642	57.400
3. Security and citizenship	3.787	3.527
4. Global Europe	11.319	9.358
5. Administration	9.943	9.945
Special instruments	0.577	0.412
TOTAL	165.795	148.199

Background and next steps

The budgetary conciliation period laid down in the treaties ended on 19 November without agreement between the Council and the Parliament on the EU budget for 2019. The Commission therefore presented a new draft budget on 30 November. Negotiations in the form of a budgetary trilogue on 4 December took place on this basis.

In order to formally adopt the EU budget for 2019, the Council now needs to adopt its position on the Commission's new draft budget, taking into account the agreement reached with the Parliament. This is scheduled to take place at the meeting of the General Affairs Council on 11 December.

The Parliament will then need to formally endorse the deal as well, by approving the Council's position. The vote in the Parliament is expected to take place at the plenary session next week.

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[Coordinated crackdown on 'Ndrangheta](#)

[mafia in Europe](#)

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5 December 2018



Unique joint investigation by judiciary and police forces in the Netherlands, Italy, Germany and Belgium culminates in the largest coordinated joint action against an organised criminal group to date in Europe.

During a joint action day starting today in the early hours, judicial and law enforcement authorities in the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg have taken coordinated and decisive action against the 'Ndrangheta. This aggressive, mafia-style organised criminal group is one of the most powerful criminal networks in the world, and controls much of Europe's cocaine trade, combined with systematic money laundering, bribery and violent acts.

The operation, code-named 'Pollino', is the biggest of its kind to date in Europe. Several hundred police, including special intervention units, were engaged in today's action, together with prosecutors and investigative officers. The judicial authorities and law enforcement agencies involved have been working intensively together since 2016, including in a joint investigation team (JIT) supported by Eurojust, the EU's Judicial Cooperation Unit, and Europol in The Hague, to prepare the action.

 As a result of close cooperation, almost 4 000 kg of cocaine and hundreds of kilos of other drugs have been detected across Europe during the course of the investigation. By 12:00 on the action day, 84 suspects have been reported arrested, including high-ranking members of the mafia network. An estimated EUR 2 million in criminal assets are expected to be seized, and many witness hearings and house searches will be conducted, securing important evidence to be used at trial. Actions are also taking place in Suriname. *(Click on image to enlarge).*

The case originated in 2014, when the Dutch Fiscal, Information and investigation Service (FIOD) referred an investigation of possible money laundering to Eurojust. The investigation looked into partners of Italian restaurants in Horst and Venray in the Netherlands and showed connections to the Nordrhein-Westfalen region in Germany as well as to criminal activity in Reggio Calabria in southern Italy. The Dutch Desk at Eurojust then proactively encouraged the other countries concerned to look into the case.

The 'Ndrangheta mafia network, which has its base in southern Italy, is known to operate by starting legitimate businesses in other countries as a cover to expand overseas, smuggling drugs, laundering illicit profits and claiming new territories as areas under their control. By splitting the activities per country, the mafia network aims to exploit legal differences between criminal jurisdictions and to escape attention, since each crime, if only investigated

separately, may appear as an isolated act rather than part of an international operation.

The creation of a JIT by the Netherlands, Italy and Germany for Operation Pollino in October 2016 had a catalytic effect on the scale and intensity of the investigation. Essentially a legal framework, a JIT is a platform for judiciary and police from different countries to work directly together in a specific case and systematically exchange operational information. Step by step, the authorities involved in Operation Pollino, including investigative judges, worked very intensively together to fit together the pieces, and pooled their knowledge and creativity in order to establish a joint strategy and uncover the actual magnitude and complexity of the criminal activity of the 'Ndrangheta. The exchange of evidence, which is essential to build solid prosecution cases, has been an important element in preparing today's action. It was the first JIT with the participation of Italy.

The practical support through EU agencies such as Eurojust and Europol has played a crucial role in Operation Pollino. The JIT has been facilitated and financed by Eurojust, which also organised a series of coordination meetings to regularly bring the actors together, support the development of a joint strategy and facilitate the mutual understanding of the different judicial systems at critical junctures of the investigation. Europol has contributed through extensive data analysis in the context of Analysis Project ITOC, which supports cases investigating the criminal activities of mafia-structured OCGs originating in Italy and impacting other Member States.

During the joint action day, prosecutors from the judicial authorities followed the action in real time from the coordination centre at Eurojust, which allows for swift analysis of new data as it is being collected during the action and makes it possible to adapt the strategy as required. Europol has also assisted the Italian police in the field with a mobile office.

Filippo Spiezia, Vice-President of Eurojust and National Member for Italy, said: *'Today, we send a clear message to organised crime groups across Europe. They are not the only ones able to operate across borders; so are Europe's judiciary and law enforcement communities. By working together and using the unique tools at our disposal in the EU, such as the possibility to form a joint investigation team and with the practical support through EU agencies such as Eurojust and Europol, we are able to detect, investigate and prosecute this kind of serious organised crime.'*

As of 11:00 today, the following actions and results have been reported:

NETHERLANDS: 5 arrests. Seizures of almost 4 000 kg of cocaine and 140 kg XTC pills. Dutch investigators from FIOD and the Dutch police have also helped to search in Italy and Germany.

Authorities involved:

- Fiscal, Information and Investigation Service (FIOD)
- Police National Unit, Dutch National Prosecution Service

ITALY: The main focus has been in the regions of Calabria and Catanzaro in southern Italy. There have been 41 arrests.

Authorities involved:

- Office of the Public Prosecutor of Reggio Calabria
- Central Operative Service of the State Police (SCO)
- State Police Investigative Department of Reggio Calabria
- Central Service of Investigation of the Guardia di Finanza (SCICO)
- Police Command for financial investigation of Guardia di Finanza (Valutaria GdF)
- Operational anti-drug department of the Guardia di Finanza of Reggio Calabria (GOA)

GERMANY: The main focus has been in the western parts of the Nordrhein-Westfalen region due to its proximity to the ARA harbours. There have been 15 arrests (+ 6 in a related operation).

Authorities involved:

- Staatsanwaltschaft Duisburg
- Bundeskriminalamt (BKA)
- There has also been close cooperation with other German organised crime investigations, with the Organised Crime Units of the Landeskriminalamt NRW, the Police in Cologne as well as the Offices of the Public Prosecutor in Cologne and Aachen, where coordinated arrests and searches have been executed today.

BELGIUM: The main focus has been in Maasmechelen in Limburg. There have been 4 arrests (+ 10 in a related operation).

Authorities involved:

- Public Prosecutor's Office Limburg
- Federal Judicial Police, Limburg
- Local Police of Lanaken-Maasmechelen, Limburg

LUXEMBOURG: Two suspects have been arrested and the national investigation is ongoing.

Authorities involved:

- Police Lëtzebuerg
- Parquet de Luxembourg
- Cabinet d'instruction Luxembourg

Eurojust Q&A (DE, EN, FR, IT and NL):

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