

Press remarks by Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis at the ECOFIN press conference

Thank you, Minister.

First of all, I would like to wish you a lot of success with the Austrian Presidency.

The Commission welcomes the focus of the Austrian Presidency on reaching deals in the areas of deepening our Economic and Monetary Union, setting up the Capital Markets Union, and also bringing forward the agenda for fair and efficient taxation.

We share these priorities.

On EMU deepening, we welcome the commitment to seal the Banking Package and to bring forward the work on the Non-Performing Loans proposals. These are important risk reduction measures.

We also feel there is enough of political will to fast track the work on the backstop to the Single Resolution Fund.

And we also have a mandate from leaders to work on the roadmap for starting political discussions on the European Deposit Insurance Scheme.

Today, the Commission presented its proposal for the Investment Stabilisation Function.

The idea is to help Member States that are hit by large asymmetric shocks to maintain their public investment, and in this way avoid deeper recessions.

We consider that our legislative proposal is a good basis for further work in the context of the EMU deepening discussions.

In addition, we presented other proposals tabled in the context of the new MFF, namely, the Reform Support Programme to provide greater financial and technical incentives for reforms at national level.

And we also presented the InvestEU programme, which builds on the success of the Juncker Plan to boost investment in Europe.

So we have a lot of work to do.

Finally, let me reiterate that the strengthening of our Economic and Monetary Union starts at home – it starts in Member States.

So today the Council formally adopted the Country-Specific Recommendations for reforms that, if implemented, could reinforce the resilience of our

economies.

Thank you very much.

Indicative programme – Agriculture and Fisheries Council of 16 July 2018

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Joint press statement following the fourteenth meeting of the Stabilisation and Association Council between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the European Union

The 14th **meeting** of the Stabilisation and Association Council between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the European Union (SA Council) took place on 13 July 2018. The meeting was **chaired** by High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice President of the Commission, Federica Mogherini, while Commissioner Johannes Hahn represented the European Commission. The delegation of the former Yugoslav Republic of

Macedonia was led by Mr. Nikola Dimitrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs. Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs Mr. Bujar Osmani also participated.

The SA Council recalled that the **Stabilisation and Association Agreement** (SAA) remains at the core of the relationship between the EU and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia until the country's accession to the EU. The SA Council took note of the country's primary objective to open accession negotiations and acknowledged the government's strong commitment to this purpose. The SA Council welcomed the EU's recent setting out of the path towards opening accession negotiations in June 2019 based on continued progress and tangible results, maintaining and deepening the current reform momentum. The SA Council took note of the intention of the Commission and government to begin the necessary preparatory work.

On **good neighbourly relations**, the SA Council strongly welcomed the signature of the agreement on the name issue and establishment of strategic partnership with Greece, as well as the entry into force of the Treaty on Friendship, Good-neighbourliness and Cooperation with Bulgaria, which set a strong example for others in the region to strengthen good neighbourly relations. The SA Council urges all leaders, political parties and citizens to recognise the benefits that the resolution of the long standing name dispute will bring and to engage constructively in the ratification and implementation of this agreement.

The SA Council reviewed the **key developments** over the previous period relating to the fulfilment of the political criteria, as well as the state of play concerning the economic criteria, financial cooperation and the implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, including institutional reforms. It noted the results of the **Stabilisation and Association Committee** held on 19-20 June 2018.

Concerning the **political criteria**, the SA Council discussed key political developments. It welcomed that the country has overcome its deep political crisis and the significant steps the government has taken to gradually restore a culture of compromise by reaching out to all stakeholders, including the opposition, to strengthen democracy and rule of law and the genuine desire to reform in an inclusive and transparent manner. The SA Council welcomed the first concrete progress towards restoring the independence of the judiciary, by implementing the Urgent Reform Priorities, and thereby starting to reverse the backsliding of previous years. The SA Council noted positively the improvement of the work of the courts and the follow-up to the work of the Special Prosecutor's Office. The SA Council acknowledged that concrete efforts have been made towards increasing transparency and accountability and involving external stakeholders in policy making, welcomed the improved climate for media freedom and noted that the environment in which civil society operates has substantially improved.

The SA Council welcomed the continuous implementation of the **Pržino agreement** and the substantial progress in the implementation of the **Urgent Reform Priorities**. The SA Council agreed on the importance of continuing and deepening current reform momentum, including through the "Plan 18", and effective implementation of on-going and planned reforms, in particular as

regards judicial reforms and the fight against corruption and organised crime, including at high level, as well as intelligence and security services reform. It also recalled the importance of a depoliticised and merit-based **public administration**. The SA Council welcomed the country's participation as an observer in the Fundamental Rights Agency. The SA Council recalled the importance of long-term confidence-building measures and more pro-active policies to further increase trust and build bridges **among communities** and welcomed the steps taken in this regard by the government.

The SA Council welcomed the country's continued active participation and constructive approach in **regional cooperation** initiatives, as well as the county's inclusion in the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative and their organisation of the first Regional Digital Summit which contributed to strengthening the digital economy in the region.

The SA Council also acknowledged the country's efforts to address the challenge of the European **migration** and refugee crisis and expects that mutually beneficial cooperation continues in the future.

Regarding **economic developments**, the SA Council recalled the targeted policy guidance agreed in May 2018 between the EU and Western Balkans and Turkey, on the Economic Reform Programmes, and encouraged the government to focus on their implementation and follow-up. It noted the good level of preparation in developing a functioning market economy and called on the country to address remaining key challenges.

The SA Council welcomed the commitment of the government to invest greater efforts into increasing the **absorption of EU funds**. It welcomed the adoption of long awaited Strategies on Public Finance Management and Public Administration Reform, which will permit EU budget support. It noted the importance of sound financial management and the need for full compliance with the sector approach criteria, as well as implementation of the European Court of Auditors' recommendations.

The SA Council noted progress in various **areas covered by the Stabilisation and Association Agreement** and welcomed the high level of trade integration with the EU. It outlined the importance of continuing to align with the EU *acquis*, especially in relation to the internal market, and welcomed progress on other international commitments, including on energy and transport connectivity. In this regard, it welcomed the adoption of the new energy law.

The SA Council also welcomed the upcoming passage to the **second stage** of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement.

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Remarks by President Donald Tusk after his meeting with Prime Minister of Albania Edi Rama

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Good afternoon and let me warmly welcome my good friend, Prime Minister Edi Rama, in Brussels.

I am happy that the context in which we are meeting is both positive and promising. It is only a few weeks ago that the Council decided to set out the path towards opening accession talks with Albania in June 2019. And the Commission has already started the preparatory work. A decision that has been unanimously endorsed by all EU heads of state and government.

This progress would not have been possible without your country's delivering steady and irreversible progress in reforms. And without your personal engagement and positive energy, thank you very much Edi, great job. I have no doubt that if Albania keeps up the reform momentum, it will be able to deliver the necessary results by next June. Because Albania's place is in the EU, and Albania will become a member of the EU. There is no doubt about this.

It is my hope and my wish that all pro-Western political forces in Albania will work towards the same goal.

Your efforts to settle remaining differences with Greece are the best proof of Albania's commitment to the EU and good neighbourly relations.

Finally, let me recall that Albania remains a good partner and a friend of the European Union. On security and migration, we have a strong and well-established cooperation. Today, we also discussed and agreed the need to step up efforts to end the new route for illegal migration through Albania. Thank you.

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President Juncker travels to Beijing for EU-China Summit and to Tokyo to sign landmark EU-Japan trade and strategic partnership agreements

The President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude **Juncker** will, alongside the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk represent the European Union at the 20th EU-China Summit and the 25th EU-Japan Summit on Monday 16 July in Beijing and Tuesday 17 July in Tokyo respectively. The two Summits will allow EU Leaders, who will be accompanied throughout by Commission Vice-President Jyrki **Katainen** and in Beijing also by Commissioners Cecilia **Malmström** and Violeta **Bulc**, to assess with their counterparts – President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Keqiang of the People's Republic of China and Prime Minister Shinzō Abe of Japan – developments in the respective bilateral relationships as well as regional and global challenges. In China, discussions are expected to focus on the expansion of the EU-China strategic relationship, on trade and investment, on their commitment to combating climate change and investing in clean energy, and on foreign and security issues, including the situation on the Korean Peninsula and the joint commitment to preserving the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – the Iran nuclear deal. In the margins of the Summit, President **Juncker** will also deliver the keynote speech at the EU-China business roundtable. While in Beijing, Commissioner **Bulc** will chair the EU-China Connectivity Platform, while Commissioner for Regional Policy, Corina **Crețu**, who will also be in China, will speak at the EU-China High Level Forum on sustainable urban development and, in the context of the EU's [International Urban Cooperation](#) programme, witness the signature of a joint declaration between Chinese and European cities. In Japan, the Leaders will sign two landmark agreements. The [Economic Partnership Agreement](#) between the EU and Japan is the biggest ever negotiated by the European Union. It will create an open trade zone covering over 600 million people and nearly a third of global GDP, and bring vast benefits both to EU consumers and EU exporters. The Strategic Partnership Agreement will provide an overarching framework for the EU and Japan to reinforce and enhance their relationship, building on existing cooperation both bilaterally and in multilateral fora, for example the United Nations and the G7. Discussions at the EU-Japan Summit are also expected to cover investment protection, and regional and global challenges. More information on the [EU-China](#) and [EU-Japan](#) summits is available online. Press conferences following the Summits are foreseen and coverage will be available on [EbS](#).
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Employment and Social Developments in Europe: 2018 review confirms positive trends but highlights challenges, in particular linked to automation and digitalisation

Today, the Commission has published the [2018 edition of its yearly Employment and Social Developments in Europe \(ESDE\) review](#). This year's edition confirms the ongoing positive labour market trends as well as an improving social

situation. The numbers of people in employment reached new record levels. At the same time we witness rising disposable incomes and lower levels of poverty. Severe material deprivation has receded to an all-time low, with 16.1 million fewer people affected, compared with 2012. But looking at the impact of technological developments, there are uncertainties about the future effects of automation and digitalisation. This is why the 2018 ESDE review is dedicated to the changing world of work. Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne **Thyssen**, said: *"The European economy is growing faster and more evenly than before. This favours employment, props up household incomes, and improves social conditions. Technological change has a high potential to boost growth and jobs, but only if we shape this change. The European Pillar of Social Rights provides a compass for getting everyone ready for this transformation. Our proposals turn the Pillar into practice, by equipping people in Europe with better education and skills throughout their life and by ensuring that all workers are covered by basic rights in this fast changing world of work, with our proposals on transparent and predictable working conditions and access to social protection."* The annual Employment and Social Developments in Europe review provides up-to-date economic analysis of employment and social trends in Europe. This year's edition of the report aims to analyse opportunities and risks linked to technological innovation, demographic change and globalisation. The review shows what needs to happen so that everybody can benefit from these developments. More information on the outcome of the review can be found in this [press release](#) and [memo](#). The [following factsheet](#) gives an overview of certain key figures. (For more information: Christian Wigand– Tel.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: + 32 229 67094)

Better access to finance for Maltese small businesses thanks to the SME initiative

The Commission, the European Investment Bank Group and the Maltese government have agreed to increase the financing available under [Malta's SME initiative programme](#). The SME invests Cohesion Policy funds via financial instruments and provide SMEs with better access to financing, with advantageous conditions. New resources from Cohesion Policy funds will top-up the programme's budget, bringing it from €15 million from Malta's Cohesion Policy envelope to up to €22 million. Three years after its launch in 2015, the programme has already triggered €60 million of financing for Maltese businesses. With this increase in the budget, overall the programme is expected to deliver €90 million of SME financing in the country. Commissioner for Regional policy Corina **Crețu** said: *"I welcome Malta's decision to increase the available financing under its SME initiative programme. This is a smart move that will directly benefit Maltese small and medium-sized businesses and entrepreneurs. It will give them the financial boost they need to turn their ideas into concrete projects or expand beyond their local markets. (For more information see the [EIB Group press release](#) or contact Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Sophie Dupin de Saint-Cyr – Tel.: +32 229 56169)*

Mergers: Commission approves acquisition of LaudaMotion by Ryanair

The European Commission has approved unconditionally under the EU Merger

Regulation the proposed acquisition of LaudaMotion by Ryanair. LaudaMotion is the company through which Mr Niki Lauda re-acquired in January 2018 the assets of NIKI, the leisure air carrier he founded in 2003 and was then later integrated into Air Berlin. The assets of NIKI were for sale because in December 2017 Lufthansa decided to withdraw from a deal to buy the company, leaving NIKI to enter into insolvency proceedings in Austria. The Commission investigated the impact of the proposed transaction on (i) the market for air transport of passengers on the routes where the activities of Ryanair and LaudaMotion overlap and (ii) examined whether LaudaMotion's portfolio of airport slots to be acquired by Ryanair at different airports would allow Ryanair to prevent competitors from entering or expanding their presence at these airports. The Commission found that Ryanair will continue to face strong competition from other carriers on the routes to and from airports where the activities of both airlines overlap and that the increase in the slot portfolio of Ryanair is unlikely to have a negative effect on passengers. The Commission therefore concluded that the proposed transaction would raise no competition concerns in any of the relevant markets. The full press release is available online in [EN](#), [FR](#), [DE](#), [GA](#). *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)*

State aid: Commission approves Dutch support to compensate damage linked to gas extraction in the province of Groningen

The European Commission has found that the support put in place by the Netherlands to compensate damage to real estate caused by earthquakes induced by drilling in the Groningen gas field is in line with EU State aid rules. The Dutch authorities notified to the Commission a plan to set up a non-profit foundation to manage real estate activities related to the repair and sale of buildings in the area concerned. This is required because the province suffers from earthquakes caused by gas extraction in the Groningen gas field. Three quarters of the activities of the foundation will be financed by Nederlandse Aardolie Maatschappij, a company involved in gas extraction at the Groningen gas field, while the remaining quarter will be financed in part by the State through a €10 million grant. The Commission is satisfied that the repair activities are ultimately funded by Nederlandse Aardolie Maatschappij, in line with the polluter pays principle. The Commission found that the financing by the State ensures the continuity of real estate transactions in the area and does not confer an advantage to Nederlandse Aardolie Maatschappij. The Commission therefore concluded that the measure does not constitute State aid. More information will be available on the Commission's [competition website](#), in the [State Aid register](#) under the case number SA.47866. *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)*

STATEMENTS

European Aviation: No more delays, the time for action is now

Commissioner for Transport Violeta **Bulc** and Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Transport and Tourism Karima **Delli** today issued a joint statement calling for action to tackle delays in air traffic in Europe. In it, they note that *"2018 is expected to be the busiest year so far in*

terms of air traffic, with 11 million flights forecast. On top of that the summer holiday season is upon us, which is the busiest period for air travel. The bleak reality is that around 50,000 passengers will face delays – every day – of up to 2 hours in airports across Europe, leading to missed connections and unforeseen costs. Our current air traffic system is struggling to cope with the ever increasing volume of traffic, and other disruptions which contribute to these delays. The system needs an urgent upgrade. Now is the moment to be bold – we need a more genuine cooperation between national air navigation service providers, and we need to work with Eurocontrol to create a more effective management of the European network.” The full version can be found [here](#). (For more information: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: +32 229 56172; Alexis Perier – Tel.: +32 229 [6 91 43](#))

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