

# Remarks by Commissioner Avramopoulos on managing migration and on upgrading the EU Visa Information System

Dear all,

The migration situation in the EU and its neighbourhood has continued to be relatively stable, but recent developments call for vigilance and continuous efforts and coordination from everyone. While there has been a steady decrease on the Central Mediterranean route, we have seen some increases at the Greek-Turkish Land border but also increased movements along the coastal route in the Western Balkans and some peaks in arrivals in the Western Mediterranean.

The European Union has continued its work on all fronts:

- protect Europe's external borders;
- strengthen cooperation with international partners;
- provide international protection to refugees;
- and save lives on dangerous migration routes.

Today's situation shows that:

- 1) our continuous efforts are making a difference;
- 2) but that our job is not done and that we need to strengthen certain efforts;
- 3) and also that we need to work towards structural and long-term solutions.

When it comes to border protection, I'm glad to say that more than 1,300 experts are deployed on the ground, helping national border guards. The European Border and Coast Guard Agency has also supported a growing number of return operations. However, Member States still need to take better advantage of the Agency's new and expanded mandate on return. Member States also need to take steps to ensure that more return decisions are really implemented.

I also call on Member States to urgently fill the pledging gaps for the European Border and Coast Guard Agency's operational activities at the EU external borders. This will also be important, for example, to provide the support needed at the Greek-Turkish border, where the European Border and Coast Guard is ready to help even more, if needed.

Today, we also propose to revise and strengthen our Visa Information System, which will equally contribute to:

- stronger external borders;
- more security;
- and fluid travel.

We propose to have automated checks through which visa authorities and border guards will be able to search all relevant databases with a single search, and obtain the information they need to do their job and prevent entry for those who pose a threat. We want to upgrade the Visa Information System to allow Member States to also exchange information on holders of long-stay visas and residence permits, and to introduce security checks on these persons.

Border guards will be able to quickly determine whether a long-stay visa or residence permit is valid, whether the person presenting the document is indeed its rightful holder, and whether the person poses a threat to the internal security of the Member States. This will make border checks easier, faster and more secure, while strengthening the security of the Schengen area.

I am also glad that the European Union has continued to uphold its values and offer protection to those in need, both here in Europe as well as along the migration routes. Under our latest resettlement scheme, 20 Member States have pledged more than 50,000 resettlement places, making it the largest collective commitment of the EU and its Member States on resettlement to date. I call on Member States to deliver at least half of those pledges by October this year, and those that haven't committed yet to urgently do so.

I'm also pleased to announce that so far 1,152 people have been evacuated from Libya to Niger through the Emergency Transit Mechanism for further resettlement to Europe. Referrals by the UNHCR should now be accelerated, so that pledges can be materialised and that persons evacuated from Libya can be resettled as soon as possible by the receiving Member States. In this context, our ongoing cooperation with several third countries has been paramount and must continue.

We have recently reached agreements with several partner countries on arrangements for return and readmission. The EU-Turkey Statement also continues to play an important role in reducing irregular and dangerous crossings. The mobilisation of the second tranche of EUR 3 billion is now under way and should be implemented swiftly.

In support of ongoing efforts to engage with partner countries and manage migration more effectively, we are today also proposing to revise the legislation on Immigration Liaison Officers and to create a genuine a European network of Immigration Liaison Officers. These officers have unique operational expertise and first-hand knowledge that is hugely important in:

- preventing and combatting irregular migration,
- facilitating the return of irregular migrants

– and managing legal migration.

The new network will strengthen coordination and enhance support for their work abroad.

Dear all, the progress that we have made so far on all fronts underlines the importance of our comprehensive and joint approach – and the need to continue it. Together we are building a stable and long-term answer to the challenges of migration today and in the future. The reform of our Common European Asylum System is an essential part of this approach, and I hope that European leaders recognise this importance and will be able to find an agreement in June.

Thank you.

---

## [EU Visa Policy: Commission upgrades the Visa Information System](#)

□The Commission is today proposing to upgrade the Visa Information System (VIS), the database containing information on persons applying for Schengen visas, in order to better respond to evolving security and migratory challenges and improve the EU's external border management.

Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, **Dimitris Avramopoulos** said: *“Every year, millions of non-EU nationals enter the EU with a visa, be it for a short stay or for a longer period. With the upgrade of the Visa Information System, we will remove blind spots in our information systems and give visa authorities and border guards the information they need to do their job properly. Criminals and potential terrorists should not be able to come to Europe unnoticed. Europe is not a fortress – but we need to know who is crossing our borders. It is our responsibility to ensure the safety of European citizens and build a Europe that protects while not hampering mobility for those travelling to the EU in good faith.”*

### **Next steps**

eu-LISA will be the EU Agency responsible for the development and management of the upgraded VIS database. As the final element of the EU visa policy reform, the Commission calls on the European Parliament and the Council to complete their legislative processes as swiftly as possible to close any remaining information gaps and facilitate travel to the EU for legitimate visitors.

## Further readings

---

### [EU Visa Policy: Commission upgrades the Visa Information System](#)

□The Commission is today proposing to upgrade the Visa Information System (VIS), the database containing information on persons applying for Schengen visas, in order to better respond to evolving security and migratory challenges and improve the EU's external border management.

Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, **Dimitris Avramopoulos** said: *“Every year, millions of non-EU nationals enter the EU with a visa, be it for a short stay or for a longer period. With the upgrade of the Visa Information System, we will remove blind spots in our information systems and give visa authorities and border guards the information they need to do their job properly. Criminals and potential terrorists should not be able to come to Europe unnoticed. Europe is not a fortress – but we need to know who is crossing our borders. It is our responsibility to ensure the safety of European citizens and build a Europe that protects while not hampering mobility for those travelling to the EU in good faith.”*

### Next steps

eu-LISA will be the EU Agency responsible for the development and management of the upgraded VIS database. As the final element of the EU visa policy reform, the Commission calls on the European Parliament and the Council to complete their legislative processes as swiftly as possible to close any remaining information gaps and facilitate travel to the EU for legitimate visitors.

## Further readings

---

### [Daily News 16 / 05 / 2018](#)

**COLLEGE MEETING: Managing migration and upgrade of the Visa Information System**

The Commission is today reporting on progress made under the [European Agenda](#)

[on Migration](#) and the [Commission's roadmap](#) from December 2017, and is setting out further key actions to be taken. While joint EU efforts have continued to show results, the situation remains fragile due to ongoing migratory pressure, as evidenced by newly increased arrivals along the Eastern and the Western Mediterranean routes. This requires the EU as a whole to show the necessary vigilance and preparedness to respond to any seasonal peaks or shifts in pressure, including from one route to another. First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans** said: *"This report confirms that we can only manage migration in a comprehensive way, through mutually reinforcing actions that are based on responsibility and solidarity."* The Commission is also today proposing to upgrade the Visa Information System (VIS), the database containing information on persons applying for Schengen visas, in order to better respond to evolving security and migratory challenges and improve the EU's external border management. Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, Dimitris **Avramopoulos** said: *"With the upgrade of the Visa Information System, we will remove blind spots in our information systems and give visa authorities and border guards the information they need to do their job properly. It is our responsibility to ensure the safety of European citizens and build a Europe that protects while not hampering mobility for those travelling to the EU in good faith."* A [press release](#) on the progress made under the European Agenda on Migration and factsheets on [migration management](#) and [Central Mediterranean Route](#) are available online. A [press release](#) on the upgrade of the Visa Information System and factsheets on the [Visa Information System \(VIS\)](#) and [EU Information Systems](#) are available online. (For more information: *Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456; Maja Kocijancic – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Tove Ernst – Tel.: +32 229 86764*)

#### **RÉUNION DU COLLÈGE: Le Collège discute les questions d'actualité internationale et autres dossiers à la veille de la réunion informelle des dirigeants de Sofia**

En préparation de la réunion informelle des dirigeants à Sofia, le 16 mai, le Collège des Commissaires a discuté des questions d'actualité incluant un compte rendu par la haute représentante / vice-présidente **Mogherini** concernant le suivi donné au retrait des Etats-Unis du programme nucléaire iranien et [les réunions UE/E3 et UE/E3 + Iran d'hier](#). La commissaire **Malmström** a informé le Collège – toujours dans le contexte des préparations de la réunion informelle – de l'état des lieux des relations commerciales entre l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis. Dans un autre registre, le Premier vice-président **Timmermans** a fait un rapport sur les résultats du Conseil des Affaires générales du 14 mai concernant l'État de droit en Pologne, puis, le commissaire **Oettinger** a présenté les principales conclusions des rapports annuels d'activité des services de la Commission pour 2017, résumant les réalisations, les initiatives prises et les ressources financières et humaines déployées au cours de l'année. (Pour plus d'informations: *Margaritis Schinas – Tel.: +32 229 60524; Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 229 91382*)

#### **COLLEGE MEETING: Three new female senior managers for the Juncker Commission**

Today the European Commission decided to appoint a new female Deputy Secretary-General as well as two new female Deputy Directors-General in Directorate-General (DG) Trade. With today's appointments, the Juncker Commission has more than tripled the number of female Deputy Directors-General to 43% – up from just 11% in November 2014. Pia Ahrenkilde Hansen was appointed Deputy Secretary-General. A Danish national, Ms Ahrenkilde Hansen was already acting Deputy Secretary-General since March. Previously she has served as European Commission Spokeswoman from 1999-2009, as Chief Spokeswoman of the Commission from 2009 to 2014 and, thereafter, as Director of the Commission's Representations in the 28 Member States for more than 3 years, thus bringing a wide range of competences and management experience at senior level to her new position. Both new Deputy Directors-General in DG Trade currently hold senior management positions in that department where they have spent a large part of their professional careers, making them ideally suited for their new positions. Sandra Gallina, an Italian national, joined the Commission in 1988 has been a Director in DG Trade since 2015. Helena König, a Swedish national, joined the Commission in 1997 and has been a Director in DG Trade since 2015. All three decisions take effect immediately. Finally, the Commission also decided to extend the mandate of Marc Mouligneau as Director of the Office for Infrastructure and Logistics in Brussels (OIB) until 31 January 2019. Please see [here](#) and [here](#) for the CVs of the senior managers. (For more information: Alexander Winterstein – Tel.: +32 229 93265; Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 2 299 13 82)

#### **COLLEGE MEETING: Visit by Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres**

As part of his two day visit to Brussels, Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres will visit the European Commission today. At a bilateral meeting with President **Juncker**, the two leaders will discuss EU-UN relations, including the UN reform and implementing the [Sustainable Development Goals](#); foreign policy issues with a particular focus on Syria and advancing the trilateral European Union – United Nations – African Union cooperation on Libya; as well as global challenges, including climate change and migration. As President **Juncker** said ahead of the meeting: *"In times marked by volatility we pride ourselves in being a reliable and predictable interlocutor. Our longstanding partnership with the United Nations, covering all pillars of United Nations activity is stronger and more articulated than ever."* Secretary-General Guterres will then join the College for a working lunch, before holding a joint press point with President **Juncker** at 13:30 CET, which will be [live on EbS+](#). See [here](#) for more information on EU – UN relations. (For more information: Margaritis Schinas – Tel.: +32 229 60524; Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 229 91382)

#### **President Juncker participates in Leaders' Meeting and EU – Western Balkans Summit in Sofia, Bulgaria**

President **Juncker** will participate today in an informal dinner of the EU28 leaders ahead of the [Western Balkans Summit](#) in Sofia, Bulgaria. In view of recent events, leaders are expected to discuss EU-US trade relations, the

future of the Iran nuclear deal, as well as the EU's response to US announcements on the imposition of sanctions and how to best protect the economic interests of European companies. In the context of the Leaders' Agenda agreed in October 2017, discussions will also focus on research and innovation and on the actions necessary to complete the Digital Single Market. The European Commission presented yesterday its contributions with a [Renewed European Agenda for Research and Innovation](#) and a set of [concrete actions](#) to protect citizens' privacy and make the EU's [Digital Single Market](#) a reality before the end of 2018. On 17 May, the EU-Western Balkans Summit will take place bringing together the Heads of State or Government of EU Member States and their counterparts from the Western Balkans. In addition to President **Juncker**, High Representative/Vice President **Mogherini**, Commissioner **Hahn** and Commissioner **Gabriel** will also take part. This is the first Summit with Western Balkan leaders for the last 15 years. Following on the [Commission's Western Balkans Strategy](#) released in February this year and President **Juncker's** visit to the region, the Summit will reaffirm the European perspective of the Western Balkans. The main points of discussion will be physical and human connectivity within the region and with the EU and addressing better shared challenges such as security and migration. As a concrete outcome of the Summit, EU Leaders are expected to adopt a Sofia Summit Declaration with follow-up actions. In the margins of the Summit, the Western Balkans partners will also sign a Statement of Support for a Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans – one of the [six flagships](#) of the Commission's Western Balkans Strategy. For more information on [the way forward between the EU and the Western Balkans](#) and their [economic relations](#) please see our dedicated factsheets. More information related to the Summit and the Leaders' meeting is available in the factsheets on the [Digital Single Market](#), [Data Protection](#) and the [Western Balkans](#). A press conference by President **Juncker**, President Tusk and Prime Minister Borissov will follow the Summit, timing to be confirmed. Watch live on EbS [here](#). (For more information: Margaritis Schinas – Tel.: +32 229 60524; Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 229 91382)

## **World Trade Organisation rejects vast majority of US claims in Airbus dispute**

The WTO Appellate Body yesterday rejected 94% of the US allegations in the dispute on support to Airbus and dismissed all US claims that any of the EU support is outright prohibited under WTO rules. Commissioner **Malmström** said: *"The WTO Appellate Body, the highest WTO court, has agreed that the EU has largely complied with its original findings. Significantly, it dismissed the vast majority of the US claims that this support had damaged Boeing's aircraft sales. The EU will now take swift action to ensure it is fully in line with the WTO's final decision in this case. Also, we look forward to the upcoming ruling by the Appellate Body on US compliance with the WTO findings of the massive and persistent government support to Boeing."* Yesterday's ruling leaves the EU with only a few remaining compliance obligations. The EU will now take swift action to bring itself into line with WTO rules as regards these remaining points. The initial case was initiated by the US in 2004 against support provided to Airbus by France, Germany, Spain and the UK for the development and production of its series of large civil aircrafts. Today's step marks the end of those compliance proceedings as the Appellate Body is the highest WTO court. The EU launched a parallel case against US

government support for Boeing aircraft in 2005. In that case we are also at the stage of the compliance proceedings after the EU argued before the WTO that the US had not made any efforts to remove its own subsidies. For more information see the [WTO report](#) and the Commission [press release](#). (For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel.: +32 229 56185; Kinga Malinowska – Tel: +32 229 51383)

### **Eurostat: Demandeurs d'asile considérés comme mineurs non accompagnés: Plus de 31 000 mineurs non accompagnés parmi les demandeurs d'asile dans l'UE en 2017, les Afghans demeurent les principaux demandeurs**

En 2017, 31 400 demandeurs d'asile sollicitant une protection internationale dans les États membres de l'Union européenne (UE) étaient considérés comme étant des mineurs non accompagnés. C'est près de la moitié du nombre enregistré en 2016 (63 200 mineurs non accompagnés enregistrés) et presque un tiers du pic enregistré en 2015 (95 200). Cela reste toutefois plus de deux fois et demi plus élevé que la moyenne annuelle relevée sur la période 2008-2013 (environ 12 000 par an). Globalement dans l'UE, les mineurs non accompagnés représentaient 15% de l'ensemble des demandeurs d'asile âgés de moins de 18 ans en 2017. En 2017, une majorité de ces mineurs non accompagnés étaient des garçons (89%) et plus des deux-tiers étaient âgés de 16 à 17 ans (77%, soit quelque 24 200 personnes), tandis que ceux âgés de 14 à 15 ans représentaient 16% des mineurs non accompagnés (environ 5 500 personnes) et ceux de moins de 14 ans 6% (près de 2 000 personnes). Les Afghans (17%, soit environ 5 300 personnes) sont restés la principale nationalité des demandeurs d'asile considérés comme mineurs non accompagnés dans l'UE. Un communiqué de presse Eurostat est à votre disposition [en ligne](#). (For more information: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456; Tove Ernst – Tel.: +32 229 86764; Katarzyna Kolanko – Tel.: +32 229 63444; Markus Lammert – Tel.: +32 229 80423)

### **Concentrations: la Commission autorise l'acquisition de Delsey par Avenue Capital, Pemberton et Permira**

La Commission européenne a approuvé, en vertu du règlement sur les concentrations, l'acquisition de Delsey basée en France par Avenue Capital basée aux Etats-Unis, Pemberton basée au Luxembourg et Permira basée au Royaume-Uni. Delsey commercialise des bagages de marque et d'autres accessoires de voyages. Avenue Capital est une entreprise d'investissement spécialisée. Pemberton est une société de gestion d'actifs principalement présente dans la dette privée et les prêts directs. Permira est une société de fonds de placement qui fournit des services de gestion de participation à des fonds d'investissement. La Commission a conclu que l'opération ne soulèverait pas de problème de concurrence au regard des chevauchements limités entre les activités des entreprises dans les marchés directement concernés ou connexes. L'opération a été examinée selon la procédure simplifiée de contrôle des concentrations. De plus amples informations sont disponibles sur le [site concurrence](#) de la Commission, dans le [registre public](#)

[des affaires](#), sous le numéro [M.8886](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Lucía Caudet – Tel. +32 229 56182; Maria Sarantopoulou – Tel.: +32 229 13740)

## **Eurostat: Le taux d'inflation annuel en baisse à 1,2% dans la zone euro et en baisse à 1,4% dans l'UE en Avril 2018**

Le taux d'inflation annuel de la zone euro s'est établi à 1,2% en avril 2018, contre 1,3% en mars. Un an auparavant, il était de 1,9%. Le taux d'inflation annuel de l'Union européenne s'est établi à 1,4% en avril 2018, contre 1,5% en mars. Un an auparavant, il était de 2,0%. Les taux annuels les plus faibles ont été observés à Chypre (-0,3%), en Irlande (-0,1%) et au Portugal (0,3%). Les taux annuels les plus élevés ont quant à eux été enregistrés en Roumanie (4,3%), en Slovaquie (3,0%) ainsi qu'en Estonie (2,9%). Par rapport à mars 2018, l'inflation annuelle a baissé dans douze États membres, est restée stable dans un et a augmenté dans quatorze autres. Un communiqué de presse Eurostat est à votre disposition [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Christian Spahr – Tel.: +32 229 50055; Enda McNamara – Tel.: +32 229 64976; Annikky Lamp – Tel.: +32 229 56151)

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **Blue Invest: Bringing together start-ups and investors in the maritime economy**

On 17 May, the Commission is organising [Blue Invest](#), the first-ever, EU-wide matchmaking event between start-ups and investors in the maritime economy. Vice-President Jyrki **Katainen** and Commissioner **Vella** will welcome hundreds of entrepreneurs and investors from across Europe in Brussels. Commissioner **Vella** said: *“Our experience shows that matching the right maritime start-up to the right investor can create an ocean of opportunity. That is the goal of Blue Invest. The huge turn-out at Blue Invest illustrates how the European Commission is at the forefront of ocean investment.”* Companies will receive advice from European Investment Bank Vice-President Jonathan Taylor, industry leaders and financial services experts about scaling up their business and raising interest from potential investors. The ‘blue economy’ includes activities from aquaculture and tourism, to ocean energy and biotechnology. As a whole, the sector is growing faster than the rest of the EU economy and it has the potential to double its size, supporting 7 million direct jobs and creating €1 trillion in turnover by 2030. Vice-President **Katainen** added: *“Boosting investment is a core priority for this Commission. The Investment Plan’s European Fund for Strategic Investments has already catalysed investments worth over €280 billion in Europe.”* More information available [here](#). (For more information: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: +32 229 56172; Iris Petsa – Tel.: +32 229 93321)

### **Commissioner Andriukaitis in Croatia to discuss issues of common interest on health and food safety with civil society**

On 16 – 17 May, Vytenis **Andriukaitis**, Commissioner for Health and Food safety will be in Croatia to meet with Mr Milan Kujundžić, Minister of Health and Mr Tomislav Tolušić, Minister of Agriculture. On 17 May in Zagreb, the Commissioner will attend a meeting at the Croatian Parliament with the

Members of the Committees for European Affairs, Agriculture and Health. Commissioner **Andriukaitis** will hold a Citizens' Dialogue alongside Mr Tomislav Tolušić, Minister of Agriculture, webstream available [here](#). In Dubrovnik, he will attend the 60th Annual General Assembly of CLITRAVI (Liaison Centre for the Meat Processing Industry in the EU). Ahead of the visit Commissioner **Andriukaitis** said *"I am looking forward to discussing key issues of common interest such as animal health, animal welfare, antimicrobial resistance, and food labelling"*. (For more information: Anca Paduraru – Tel.: +32 229 91269; Aikaterini Apostolo – Tel.: +32 229 87624)

### **Commissioner Avramopoulos in Vienna to prepare upcoming EU Presidency of Austria**

Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris **Avramopoulos** will be in Vienna tomorrow to meet with Minister of Interior Herbert Kickl, Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs Karin Kneissl and Minister within the Federal Chancellery for the EU, Arts, Culture and Media Gernot Blümel. Discussions will focus on Austria's priorities under its upcoming EU Presidency as well as migration and security. In the morning, Commissioner **Avramopoulos** will take part in an EU-Citizens' Dialogue on the "Future of the EU: Challenges for a humanitarian Europe? Migration, solidarity and security in the EU." More information on the Citizen's Dialogue [here](#). (For more information: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456; Tove Ernst – Tel.: +32 229 86764; Markus Lammert – Tel.: +32 229 58602)

### **Commissioner Crețu in the Republic of Moldova, on EU support to the country's regional development**

Tomorrow until Monday, Commissioner for regional policy Corina **Crețu** is in the Republic of Moldova. In Chișinău the Commissioner will meet Pavel Filip, Prime Minister, Liviu Volconovici, Minister of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment and Iurie Leanca, Deputy Prime Minister for European Integration. Commissioner **Crețu** will also meet several representatives of the civil society, of political parties, business partners and senior EU officials working for the country's regional development. On Saturday, the Commissioner will visit Ungheni, chosen to be one of the [2018 European Villages](#), where citizens can learn about EU support to the country, especially through EU-funded projects developed in their region. Commissioner **Crețu** said: *"My visit will focus on how cohesion policy, especially via the [Danube macro-regional strategy](#) and our cross border cooperation programmes, can support regional development and economic growth in the Republic of Moldova."* (For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Sophie Dupin de Saint-Cyr – Tel.: +32 229 56169)

[Upcoming events](#) of the European Commission (ex-Top News)

---

# Remarks by President Donald Tusk ahead of the EU-Western Balkans summit and the Leaders' agenda dinner

Press contacts

## Preben Aamann

European Council President Spokesperson

+32 2 281 51 50

+32 476 85 05 43

We are ahead of a summit during which EU leaders will discuss innovation, European future for Western Balkans, and the response to President Trump's policies on trade and Iran.

Starting with our dinner tonight, we will have a debate on innovation and the digital economy. Europe is lagging behind other major economies in terms of innovation. Innovation is set to impact our lives at an ever-growing pace over the coming years, raising not only hopes but also ethical questions. Europe needs to play an active part in this transformation, as it will be the reality of all Europeans. That is why tonight, I will ask EU leaders two questions: *What do they want to do at the EU level to boost breakthrough innovation? And: How do they want the EU become a major player in big data?*

Following last week's announcement of the United States withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran, we need a united European front. I want leaders to reconfirm that the EU sticks to the deal as long as Iran does. The deal is good for European and global security, which is why we must maintain it. Despite the US hesitation. We will also look at options for the EU to protect European companies from negative consequences of the US decision. And I want the European Commission to be given a green light, so that it is ready to act whenever European interests are affected. We should also seek ways, together with other partners, to address very real concerns over Iran's ballistic missile programme and its regional activities.

Trade is another topic for tonight's discussion. We will decide on the best way forward in EU-US trade relations. Here again, unity is our greatest strength. And my objective is simple: we stick to our guns. This means a permanent exemption from US tariffs on aluminium and steel if we are to discuss possible trade liberalisation with the US. The EU and US are friends and partners, therefore US tariffs cannot be justified on the basis of national security. It is absurd to even think that the EU could be a threat to the US. We need to bring back reality in this discussion, which is not the case today.

Tomorrow, we will meet our Western Balkan partners collectively for the first

time in fifteen years. It will be an opportunity for both sides to reaffirm that the European perspective remains the Western Balkans' geostrategic choice. Beyond the longer-term outlook, we want to demonstrate that we care about socio-economic development in the region here and now. Investing in infrastructural and human connections with and within the Western Balkans is in the EU's best interest. And it will be the objective of our summit. I hope to bring our Western Balkan friends closer to the EU.

Everything we are going to discuss today and tomorrow, has a global dimension. I have no doubt that in the new global game, Europe will either be one of the major players, or a pawn. This is the only real alternative. In order to be the subject and not the object of global politics, Europe must be united economically, politically and also militarily like never before. To put it simply: either we are together, or we will not be at all.

Besides traditional political challenges such as the rise of China, or the aggressive stance of Russia, we are witnessing today a new phenomenon: the capricious assertiveness of the American administration. Looking at the latest decisions of President Trump someone could even think: with friends like that who needs enemies. But frankly speaking, Europe should be grateful to President Trump. Because thanks to him we have got rid of all illusions. He has made us realise that if you need a helping hand, you will find one at the end of your arm. Europe must do everything in its power to protect, in spite of today's mood, the transatlantic bond. But at the same time we must be prepared for those scenarios, where we will have to act on our own. We have enough potential to rise to the challenge. But what we need is more political unity and determination. There is no single objective reason why Europe should have any complexes about anyone else. Being a European is a reason to be proud. We have a right and an obligation to hold our heads up high, both when with our enemies and when with our friends. And this is what, in some sense, our summit will be about.

[Visit the meeting page](#) [Download as pdf](#)