

Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini on the EU Strategy on Syria during the plenary session of the

Check against delivery!

Thank you very much.

I am particularly glad we have the opportunity to share in this hemicycle again the work we are doing on Syria, especially today as the UN has reconvened the talks; the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva just started this morning. I just spoke a couple of hours ago with Staffan de Mistura again, the UN Special Envoy [for Syria] who has concluded this morning the first renewed round of talks with the Syrian parties aiming at entering into the substance of the political transition, including on constitutional set-up. This is the process on which and in which the European Union is investing, supporting the intra-Syrian talks, the UN facilitation and the work of the Syrian opposition, the civil society, especially the women of Syria – work that we support every day with our teams, both in Geneva and in Brussels, but also in the region.

So, the European Union has a special role to play, to help the Syrian people end the war in their country. The European Union is not a military actor in Syria – I know some might argue that this makes us a less powerful player in the region. Even if, as you know well, I always value a lot whenever we manage or we decide to use also our hard power in some situations that require this, I strongly believe that the fact that we are not a military player in the Syrian crisis makes us stronger in the political context of trying to solve the problem and the crisis there.

Because we have not taken part in the devastation of the country, and at the same time we have been on the side of the civilian population, all throughout the war, as the first humanitarian donor for Syrians both within and outside of the country. Exactly for this reason we have a stronger role to play when it comes to the political mediation and solution.

First of all, let me stress one basic thing that sometimes we take for granted, but I think in these times we are living, it is definitely not something that is irrelevant: we are the ones contributing to the humanitarian work inside Syria and around Syria. We are the ones bringing aid through the UN agencies and international organisations; trying to save every single life; trying to bring every single child to school; trying to guarantee the minimum basic living conditions for Syrians.

This is something I will always be proud of. Some might consider that *realpolitik* goes as far as making this irrelevant. Let me tell you the basic

condition not only of humanity from my perspective, but also for the political future of Syria, is that there are some Syrians left. I am sorry, this is very hard to say but our work of saving lives on the ground, guaranteeing that people have humanitarian aid, medical assistance, food, water – basic, basic living conditions – is first a humanitarian duty, and second is also a major political asset also to be a recognised, trusted political actor for the parties. It is precious, so much precious that to me it is invaluable.

Because we have not destroyed, because we help people's daily life, we can better help the Syrians rebuild the future of the country. And this is something that not only the international community, not only the region, but also and first of all the Syrians recognise to the European Union. This is the core of the European Union's Strategy on Syria – adopted by the Council on the 3rd of April, with Conclusions endorsing my joint communication with the Commission [Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council – Elements for an EU Strategy for Syria]. This is our answer to anyone who believes – as I was saying – that we are powerless because we are not shooting. It is exactly the contrary. The entire European Union is united behind the goal of a political solution to the war, and the means to achieve it. It demonstrates what we can do in practice to end this war and ensure that lives are protected, rights respected, democratic aspirations and needs are met.

In the Strategy we outlined a clear set of objectives: seeking a political solution to the conflict within the UN framework, supporting the opposition – including the High Negotiation Committee – to develop their proposal for a meaningful and inclusive transition, and in parallel – as I said – working to save lives, to promote human rights, to strengthen civil society, the role of women, to promote accountability for war crimes – extremely important, I will come back to that – and to support the resilience of the Syrian people.

The Strategy indicates the direction of our actions; it is not a philosophical paper; it is a roadmap for acting together. Two days after it was endorsed, we have begun to put it in practice, hosting the major Ministerial conference on Syria in Brussels, together with the Secretary General of the United Nations. We brought together 80 delegations from countries and international organisations from the region and the entire world, raising more than 9 billion euros until 2020, including 5.6 billion euros for 2017 alone. There was a risk of the international community being disrupted; of having a sort of donors' *fatigue* when it comes to the support to Syrians and I was glad to see that we managed to mobilise more resources than last year in London [Supporting Syria and the Region – London 2016]. This is important, it makes a difference to the lives of the people on the ground. But again – as I said – it makes a difference also for the UN and our support to the UN system, another political objective we have very deep in our hearts and minds in this period of time and it strengthens the possibility for a political work to be done in Geneva.

More than two thirds of this amount comes from the European Union and the Member States. So, once again, we are throwing a lifeline to millions of Syrians, inside the country and in the region, building in this way the basic

conditions for the future of Syria, the survival of Syrians.

As you might remember, on the eve of the Brussels Conference, a terrible chemical attack hit Idlib's province and I do not believe this was a complete coincidence. Normally, as the international community gathers to work for peace and show unity, and determination and commitment, the enemies of peace tried to derail its efforts.

But that very same day, from Brussels, from the European Union, from the UN, from so many countries and organisations, we sent two powerful messages. First, we all agreed that those responsible for these crimes must be held accountable. And last week, exactly one week ago, on Europe's Day, the 9th of May, in New York, I was briefing the UN Security Council and sharing with them the fact that the European Union fully stands behind the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in its investigations: this is the right forum to document any responsibilities for the use of chemical weapons in Syria. The Brussels Conference also made a call for support to the new "International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism," established by the UN General Assembly, which will assist in investigating and prosecuting war crimes cases in Syria. Accountability for us is key.

Second, in Brussels we all committed to work for a political solution agreed among the Syrian parties as the only just but also the only realistic way to end the war.

Accountability and the need to support a political solution and to be serious about that: these were also the main messages we heard from the representatives of the Syrian civil society, Syrian women, during the Brussels Conference. We heard a very powerful word from them: *hudna, hudna, hudna*. They were repeating it to us, and this means "we need a ceasefire". We need violence to decrease and peace to reach some areas of the country. For three days, around the Brussels Conference, over 40 Syrians from all parts of Syria and from the diaspora, representatives of civil society organisations with very different backgrounds, women and men, different ages, worked to agree on a set of common messages for the Conference. Their representatives delivered their messages to the ministers in the political session. We have immediately turned the Strategy's recognition of the civil society's crucial role into practice and I know this Parliament is particularly supportive of that, rightly so. These are the people who can reach across the conflict lines, talk to each other, heal the wounds of over six years of war, to make reconciliation truly possible on the ground, locally. And the expertise they hold will also be essential to post-conflict reconstruction.

In fact, let me say the Syrians who came to Brussels from within and outside of Syria, different parts of the country, agreed very much with our determination to begin preparations for the day after the end of the conflict. Because too many times – too many times – the international community – and also Europe – was not prepared for *winning the peace* after a war had ended. It is a mistake that we cannot afford anymore, Syria and the Syrians cannot afford that mistake. Of course, reconstruction will only begin when a political transition will be under way, not before. This is in the hands of the Syrian talks in Geneva under the UN auspices that the European

Union is accompanying day by day. But the European Union has already started to engage and to contribute to the post-agreement planning in close cooperation with the United Nations and the World Bank. Also because this can be a very powerful tool, maybe one of the most powerful tools today, to support and accompany the political process, showing the peace dividend, being an incentive to the Syrian parties to find and implement an agreement.

The same logic marks our Syria Strategy: we don't try to bet on the future, but to prepare for it and contribute to shaping it, together with the UN, together with the powers of the region, but most of all, with the people of Syria. Because peace can only come from the Syrian people, from a political solution agreed by the Syrian parties.

This is the most complex and the most violent conflict in our times and it is clear to all in the world that no regional or global power alone has the strength to solve it. We need forces to join along one line, which is a political solution agreed by the Syrian parties in Geneva under the UN auspices.

All different initiatives – and we wish that all of them manage to deliver and to be implemented, including the ones taken in Astana – now have the big responsibility to converge towards Geneva, to help the Syrians build peace and find their own path towards national reconciliation. And there are no shortcuts for that. We have seen it for six years: Geneva, the UN process, the multilateral framework, these intra-Syrian talks is and must remain the only way to transition.

As I said today, Staffan de Mistura has resumed the talks with a clear intention of entering into the substance of the transition, starting from the constitutional set-up of the country. The European Union stands there in Geneva, as well as the work we do in Brussels and in the region, to accompany the UN, their work, to accompany the Syrian people for a democratic, united and inclusive Syria to finally bring peace to the country and to our entire region.

Thank you.

[Statement by the Spokesperson on the murder of journalists in Mexico](#)

The continuing wave of targeted assassinations and attacks against journalists in Mexico raises serious concerns. Yesterday, two journalists, Javier Valdez, laureate of the International Press Freedom Award, and

Jonathan Rodríguez Córdova were shot dead while Sonia Córdova was seriously injured. The EU expresses its deepest condolences to the families and colleagues of the victims, and wishes a prompt recovery to Mrs Córdova.

Swift and transparent investigations are needed in order to bring perpetrators of all crimes to justice. In this context we note the request issued after the first crime by Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto for the Special Prosecutor for Crimes against Freedom of Expression (FEADLE) to support local authorities in the investigation.

These incidences of violence – with seven murders of journalists since the beginning of the year and fifteen in 2016 – make Mexico one of the most dangerous countries in the world for media workers. The Mexican authorities are expected to effectively protect journalists, to allow them to work without fear of reprisals and to end impunity in the cases of crimes against journalists and activists.

The EU remains firmly committed to promoting freedom of expression and freedom of press. The existence of free, diverse and independent media is an indispensable precondition for the protection and promotion of democracy.

European Agenda on Security: Commission sets out new approach on interoperability of information systems

In addition to providing an update on progress made on key files, the report focuses on the ongoing work to improve information management for borders and security and sets out the Commission's new approach towards achieving the interoperability of EU information systems for security, border and migration management by 2020. Following the recent global cyberattack, the report also stresses the Commission's commitment to accelerate work to review the 2013 EU Cybersecurity Strategy in order to provide an effective response to cyber threats.

Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris **Avramopoulos** said: *"The value of our security information is maximised when our systems talk to each other. The complex and fragmented systems we have today make us vulnerable. Actionable information is not always available for the law enforcement officials that need it. Today, we present a clear vision on how to act to correct this. To connect the dots and to eliminate blind spots to step up the security of our citizens across the EU."*

Commissioner for the Security Union Julian **King** said: *"The recent tragic*

attacks in Europe have highlighted the importance of effective information sharing between Member State authorities. The approach we are outlining today sets out a targeted and intelligent way of using the existing data to best effect. What we propose would be a step-change in the way we manage data for security, helping national authorities better addressing transnational threats and detecting terrorists who act across borders.”

In April 2016, the Commission presented a Communication on stronger and smarter information systems for borders and security and launched the work of the High Level Expert Group on Information Systems and Interoperability. The High Level Expert Group delivered its [report on 11 May](#) confirming the views expressed in the April 2016 Communication, and putting forward recommendations towards the interoperability of information systems. Today's report takes stock of the recommendations of the High Level Expert Group, and proposes the way forward to address structural shortcomings under the three main areas: (i) maximising the utility of existing information systems; (ii) where necessary, developing complementary systems to close information gaps; and (iii) ensuring interoperability between our systems.

Over the past year, the Commission has put forward a number of proposals with the aim of closing the outstanding information gaps, including the establishment of new systems such as the EU Entry/Exist System and the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) as well as reinforcing existing ones such as the Schengen Information System, Eurodac and the European Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS).

Today's sets out a new approach to the management of data, where all centralised EU information systems for security, border and migration management are interoperable in full respect of data protection and fundamental rights. The main features of this approach are:

- **European search portal** – allowing the systems to be searched simultaneously, in full compliance with data protection safeguards and possibly with more streamlined rules for access to the systems by law enforcement authorities;
- **Shared biometric matching service** – enabling searches across different information systems holding biometric data, possibly with hit/no-hit flags indicating the connection with related biometric data found in another system;
- **Common identity repository** – based on alphanumeric identity data (e.g. dates of birth, passport numbers) and detecting whether a person is registered under multiple identities in different databases.

The proposed approach would overcome the current weakness in the EU's data management architecture eliminating blind spots. As a result, the EU Agency responsible for information system management, eu-LISA, would play a crucial role in providing technical expertise and bringing the work towards the interoperability of information systems forward. In order to allow eu-LISA to implement this new approach, the Commission will present a legislative proposal to strengthen the Agency's mandate in June 2017.

Next steps

The Commission will discuss the new approach with the European Parliament and the Council with an aim of reaching a common understanding on the way forward before the end of 2017. The discussion will feed into the proposal on interoperability which the Commission will present as soon as possible.

As the same time, the Commission calls on the European Parliament and the Council to move swiftly on the delivery of legislative priorities on information systems for security, borders and migration management.

In the area of aviation security, the Commission has facilitated contacts at political level to ensure coordinated actions between the United States and the EU. A meeting between the United States and the EU side will take place in Brussels on 17 May 2017, in order to jointly assess the potential risks and work towards a common approach to address possible developing threats.

Background

President Juncker's [State of the Union](#) address in September 2016 and the European Council conclusions of [December 2016](#) highlighted the importance of overcoming the current shortcomings in data management and of improving the interoperability of existing information systems. Recent terrorist attacks have brought this into even greater focus, highlighting the urgent need for information systems to be interoperable, and to eliminate the current blind spots where terrorist suspects can be recorded in different, unconnected databases under different aliases.

In [April 2016](#) the Commission presented a Communication on stronger and smarter information systems for borders and security, initiating a discussion on how information systems in the European Union can better enhance border management and internal security. In June 2016, the Commission set up a High Level Expert Group on Information Systems and Interoperability to take this work forward and to address the legal, technical and operational challenges to achieve interoperability. The High Level Expert Group held its last meeting on 25 April 2017 and presented the [final report](#) on 11 May 2017.

The [European Agenda on Security](#) guides the Commission's work in this area, setting out the main actions to ensure an effective EU response to terrorism and security threats in the European Union. Since the adoption of the agenda, significant progress has been made in its implementation, paving a way towards an effective and genuine and [Security Union](#).

For More Information

[Communication](#): 7th Progress Report on Security Union

[Communication](#): Stronger and smarter information systems for borders and security

[Communication](#): Delivering on the European Agenda on Security to fight against terrorism and pave the way towards an effective and genuine Security Union

[Communication](#): European Agenda on Security

Commission introduces new measures to fight poaching and to end trade in raw ivory

Is the Commission banning ivory exports?

The export of raw ivory is banned. The Commission guidance document recommends that EU Member States cease issuing export documents for **raw ivory**. Without an export document, no export of ivory can take place. Between 2013 and 2016, around 1900 old ivory tusks were exported legally from the EU to Asia, marking a sharp increase compared to previous years. Such exports will no longer be possible under the new guidance document.

The **export of worked ivory** will only be possible under very strict conditions. Only items acquired before 1976 can be exported and it is for the person wishing to export the items to demonstrate that they were acquired before that date. If such evidence cannot be provided by the applicant, then no export document will be delivered by the exporting EU Member State.

The legal export of worked ivory from the EU has also increased in recent years, reaching several thousand items annually. The most commonly exported products are small items made of ivory or containing ivory, musical instruments (especially pianos with ivory keys), carvings and antiques. The Commission guidance document recommends that EU Member States exercise a high level of scrutiny before authorising any export of worked ivory. It details, in particular, what type of evidence demonstrating the legality of the items can be accepted.

What are the international and EU rules on ivory trade?

International ivory trade is banned under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), with narrowly defined exemptions (for example for items acquired before elephants became protected under CITES).

EU rules on ivory trade are more restrictive than the CITES regime in many instances, notably as they regulate domestic trade in ivory, which is not required under CITES.

Can I import ivory into the EU? Can I purchase ivory goods and bring them in to the EU?

Import of ivory is prohibited, except for very narrow exemptions. Most of the ivory traded into the EU consists of hunting trophies and of old carvings or musical instruments imported as personal belongings (for example as part of a removal). These imports can only take place with the relevant export and import documents and are subject to very strict controls at the borders by customs agencies.

What is the EU doing against illegal ivory trade in the EU?

The Commission is fully committed to fight illegal ivory trade. Tackling ivory trafficking is a priority for the EU. Under the EU Action Plan against wildlife trafficking, the Commission, enforcement agencies in the Member States and Europol have stepped up action against ivory trafficking. This is already delivering first results. Member States seized more than 2.5 tonnes of ivory in 2016, the biggest volume in recent years. Most of this ivory was seized in the EU on its way to Asia.

Why is the EU not banning all intra-EU trade in ivory?

Intra-EU trade in ivory is limited and strictly regulated. Domestic ivory is authorised only for ivory items imported into the EU before elephant species obtained maximum protection under the CITES Convention (18 January 1990 for the African elephant and 1 July 1975 for the Asian elephant) and subject to strict controls. Domestic EU trade can only take place if a certificate has been issued to this effect by the relevant EU Member State, except for “worked items” acquired before 3 March 1947 – , which can be traded in the EU without a certificate.

Since the international ban on ivory trade came into effect, the demand for ivory in Europe has fallen considerably. Intra-EU trade consists mostly of antiques and EU Member States have not been identified as important destination markets for ivory of illegal origin. However, there have been some instances of illegal trade in ivory items within the EU, and there are differences between Member States in applying EU rules on ivory trade. Therefore, the new guidance document sets out criteria and recommendations for Member States to further strengthen vigilance and controls.

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President Juncker consults the European Parliament on Mariya Gabriel as Commissioner for the Digital Economy and Society

President **Jean-Claude-Juncker** interviewed today Mariya Gabriel, the [candidate proposed](#) by the Bulgarian Government for Commissioner to replace former Member of the Commission Kristalina **Georgieva**. On this basis, President **Juncker** confirmed the competencies of Mariya Gabriel required under Article 17(3) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) to become candidate for

Commissioner and announced his intention to allocate the Digital Economy and Society portfolio to her. A [Mission Letter](#) sent today by President Juncker to Mariya Gabriel details her main tasks and responsibilities as Commissioner in charge of the Digital Economy and Society. Following today's interview of Mariya Gabriel and the announcement by President **Juncker** of the portfolio allocation, the process will now follow Article 246(2) TFEU and point 6 of the Framework Agreement between the European Parliament and the European Commission. An exchange of views between Mariya Gabriel and the relevant Committee of the European Parliament is expected to take place in the coming weeks. Read the full press release available in all EU languages [here](#). (For more information: Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 229 91382)

Commission calls on Member States to meet obligations under the EU's emergency relocation and resettlement schemes and sets out new approach on interoperability of information systems on borders and security

Meeting in Strasbourg, today the College of Commissioners will adopt two reports on the EU's emergency relocation and resettlement schemes and on progress made towards an effective and genuine Security Union. The first report will take stock of actions taken by Member States over the last month to fulfil their commitments under the relocation and resettlement schemes. On the European Agenda on Security, today's report will provide an update on the state-of-play with regards to the important work being carried out to improve security in the EU, and at its borders through better data management and the interoperability of information systems. Full press material will be available [online](#) at the start of the press conference in Strasbourg with Commissioners **Avramopoulos** and **King** which will be livestreamed [here](#). (For more information: Tove Ernst – Tel.: +32 229 86764; Katarzyna Kolanko – Tel.: +32 299 63444)

Commission registers European Citizens' Initiative on reducing the wage and economic differences

The European Commission has today decided to make a partial registration of a European Citizens' Initiative which invites the Commission to propose "Legal acts that clearly demonstrate the EU's intention to eliminate wage inequalities between Member States and which – to achieve this objective – allow for a more efficient cohesion of these states". The formal registration of this Initiative on 22 May 2017 will start a one-year process of collection of signatures of support by its organisers. Should the Initiative receive one million statements of support within one year, from at least seven different Member States, the Commission will have to react within three months. The Commission's Decision makes clear for which kind of legal acts the signatures may and may not be collected in this case, dependent on the competences set out in the Treaties. More information is available in the press release available [here](#). (For more information: Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 229 91382; Tim McPhie – Tel.: +32 229 58602)

"Lower Saxony in Europe and Europe in Lower Saxony": speech by President Juncker at the Lower Saxony Landtag

As part of his discussions with regional parliaments and local authorities, President **Juncker** was in Hannover, Germany yesterday to mark the 70th anniversary of the Parliament of Lower Saxony. Speaking about the importance of national and regional parliaments, President **Juncker** declared: *"Nations are not temporary inventions of history, their presence is permanent. And the same applies to regions. We can only construct Europe with and not against them"*. The President also stressed that *"it is important that the European Commission (...) remains in intensive dialogue with national and regional parliaments"* and invited the Lower Saxony Parliament to be involved in European politics even more and to participate in the debate about the future of Europe. In his speech, the President addressed a wide range of issues, from EU migration policy, to the Digital Single Market, Capital Markets Union, Energy Union, the Juncker Plan and our single currency, the euro. Speaking about the social dimension of Europe, he said: *"We have to pay more attention to the concerns of Europeans in social matters. (...) We must again turn back to those, for whom Europe was invented. Dreaming cannot be forbidden"*. Finally, President **Juncker** also spoke about the benefits Member States derive from the European Union, notably through the EU budget. *"In Europe there are no net payers and net recipients. In Europe, all Member States are net recipients because without Europe they would be net payers,"* he said. The full speech in German is available [here](#), and a recording can be found on the [EbS website](#). (For more information: Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 229 91382)

Commission welcomes European Parliament vote on extension and reinforcement of the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), the heart of the Juncker Plan

The Commission welcomes the vote by Members of the European Parliament's Budgets and Economic and Monetary Affairs committees to agree their position on extending, expanding and reinforcing the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), the so-called "EFSI 2.0". The proposal seeks to extend the EFSI's duration and enhance its financial capacity. The target of investment mobilised is to be increased from EUR 315 billion by 2018 to at least half a trillion euro by 2020. The proposal also places a greater emphasis on additionality and aims to further enhance the EFSI's transparency and geographic balance. European Commission Vice-President Jyrki **Katainen**, responsible for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness, said: *"The European Fund for Strategic Investments has already proven to be an important tool to boost investment, support jobs and spur growth across all 28 Member States. The extension of the EFSI represents an opportunity to build on that success. I look forward to continue working with Members of the European Parliament and Member States in the weeks to come to secure a final agreement."* The Commission now calls on the Parliament and Member States to continue working towards the final adoption of the EFSI 2.0 proposal as quickly as possible to the benefit of public and private promoters driving investment projects in Europe. A full press release is available [here](#). (For more information: Annika Breidthardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153; Enda McNamara – Tel.: +32 229 64976)

Juncker Plan: EUR 80 million for Italian SMEs

The [Juncker Plan](#) has backed a European Investment Fund (EIF) agreement with Banca Popolare Pugliese, an Italian financial intermediary, to provide EUR 80 million in financing to innovative Italian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and small mid-caps over the next two years. The European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), the central pillar of the Juncker Plan, was a crucial factor in making this loan agreement possible. European Commission Vice-President Jyrki **Katainen**, responsible for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness, said: *"The Investment Plan has already proven to be a success and Italy is amongst the Plan's top beneficiaries. I am delighted that, with today's agreement, even more Italian small and medium-sized businesses will gain access to the finance they need to innovate, grow, hire new employees and expand their activities."* The Juncker Plan is now expected to trigger over EUR 31 billion in investments in Italy and EUR 183.5 billion across Europe. For the latest figures country-by-country, see [here](#). A full press release is available [here](#). (For more information: Annika Breidthardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153; Enda McNamara – Tel.: +32 229 64976)

Commission introduces new measures to fight poaching and end trade in raw ivory

The Commission is moving to end the export of old raw ivories as of 1 July, with the adoption of [new guidance on the EU rules governing ivory trade](#). Today's decision, foreseen in the [EU Action Plan against wildlife trafficking](#), will help to prevent that legal ivory trade fuels international ivory trafficking, which has risen significantly over the last decade. The Commission will also grant new financial support of € 2.25 million to the Secretariat of the [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora](#) (CITES) to help with the implementation of the decisions on international wildlife trade agreed at the [CITES Conference of Parties](#) in October 2016. Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Karmenu **Vella** said: *"Fighting international ivory trafficking is a battle we can't afford to lose. By ending the export of ivory tusks and other raw ivory we are living up to our responsibility. And we are delivering on the next commitment in our Action Plan against wildlife trafficking. Our financial support for developing countries will strengthen their capacity to implement the CITES Convention. This is essential to achieve progress in the fight against poaching and for sustainable wildlife trade."* A [press release](#) and [Q&A](#) on the new guidelines are available online. (For more information: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: +32 229 56172; Iris Petsa – Tel.: + 32 229 93321)

Aviation Safety: Commission clears all airlines from Benin and Mozambique from EU Air Safety List

The European Commission updated the [EU Air Safety List](#), the list of non-

European airlines that do not meet international safety standards, and are therefore subject to an operating ban or operational restrictions within the European Union. The [EU Air Safety List](#) seeks to ensure the highest level of air safety for European citizens, which is a top priority of the [Aviation Strategy](#) adopted by the Commission in December 2015. Following today's update, all airlines certified in Benin and Mozambique are cleared from the list, while four individual airlines are added (Med-View, Mustique Airways, Aviation Company Urga and Air Zimbabwe). Commissioner for Transport Violeta **Bulc** said: *"I am glad that we are able to take all carriers from Benin and Mozambique out of the air safety list. Their reforms have paid off. This is also a signal to the 16 countries that remain on the list. It shows that work and cooperation pays off. The Commission and the European Aviation Safety Agency are ready to assist them and raise the safety standards worldwide".* More information is available in a press release in [EN](#), [FR](#) and [DE](#). (For more information: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: +32 229 56172; Alexis Perier – Tel.: +32 229 [6 91 43](#))

European Commission marks the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia

Ahead of the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia on 17 May, First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans** said: *"Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) people are our parents, our children, our siblings, our friends, our neighbours and our fellow Europeans. Let's treat them as such. It's time we put an end to the widespread discrimination against LGBTI people together."* Commissioner Věra **Jourová** added: *"No matter who you love or who you are, everyone should enjoy the same rights and be protected from discrimination in the same way. We call on Member States to unblock discussions on the Equal Treatment Directive which would prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in education, social protection and access to goods and services."* Last year, the Commission published a [list of actions](#) to advance LGBTI equality, which sets out the EU's activities in this field for 2016-2019. Outside the EU, engaging in same-sex relationships is still considered a crime in more than 70 countries. You can find [online](#) a statement by High Representative/ Vice-President Federica **Mogherini**. For the first ever, the Commission will organise, under the responsibility of Commissioner Günther **Oettinger**, an event for European Commission staff on the occasion of IDAHOT tomorrow, on the theme of 'Inclusion and Identity in the Workplace: an asset for all of us'. To show the Commission's support for diversity and for LGBTI equality, the European Commission's Berlaymont headquarters and the headquarters of the European External Action Service will be lit up tonight in the colours of the rainbow flag. A [factsheet](#) on advancing LGBTI equality is available online, as well as the first testimony in the series of #EU4LGBTI stories – [Roberto & Andrea](#). (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: + 32 229 67083; Mélanie Voin – Tel.: +32 229 58659; Tim McPhie – Tel.: +32 229 58602)

EUROSTAT: Le PIB en hausse de 0,5% tant dans la zone euro que dans l'UE28

Au cours du premier trimestre 2017, le PIB corrigé des variations saisonnières a augmenté de 0,5% dans la zone euro (ZE19) ainsi que dans l'UE28 par rapport au trimestre précédent, selon l'estimation rapide publiée

par Eurostat, l'office statistique de l'Union européenne. Au cours du quatrième trimestre 2016, le PIB avait crû respectivement de 0,5% et 0,6%. Un communiqué de presse est disponible [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Annika Breidthardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153; Juliana Dahl – Tel.: +32 229 59914)

EUROSTAT: Excédent de 30,9 milliards d'euros du commerce international de biens de la zone euro

D'après les premières estimations pour le mois de mars 2017, les exportations de biens de la zone euro (ZE19) vers le reste du monde se sont établies à 202,3 milliards d'euros, en hausse de 13% par rapport à mars 2016 (178,9 mrd). Les importations depuis le reste du monde ont quant à elles été de 171,4 mrd d'euros, en hausse de 14% par rapport à mars 2016 (150,7 mrd). En conséquence, la zone euro a enregistré en mars 2017 un excédent de 30,9 mrd d'euros de son commerce international de biens avec le reste du monde, contre +28,2 mrd en mars 2016. Le commerce intra-zone euro a progressé à 168,1 mrd d'euros en mars 2017, soit +12% par rapport à mars 2016. Un communiqué de presse est disponible [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Daniel Rosario – Tel.: + 32 229 56185; Kinga Malinowska- Tel.: +32 229 Kinga 51383)

STATEMENTS

Statement by Commissioner Stylianides on the Ebola outbreak in the Northeast of the Democratic Republic of Congo

Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management and EU Ebola Coordinator Christos **Stylianides** has issued a statement following the declaration of an Ebola outbreak in the Northeast of the Democratic Republic of Congo: *"The EU is fully committed to provide all support necessary. The national authorities, with the support of the World Health Organisation (WHO), and the European Commission's experts in the country as well as international medical NGOs, have set in motion initial measures to respond to the situation. The European Commission's Emergency response Coordination Centre (ERCC) is taking necessary preparedness measures for a potential EU intervention in case the European Medical Corps and logistical capacities would be needed. In these early days of the outbreak our priority must be to maintain close and efficient coordination with the national authorities, the WHO, EU Member States, international partners and NGOs on the ground. (...) In this regard we are in close contact with our Member States. This new outbreak is a stark reminder that we can never let our guard down. (...)"* The full statement is online [here](#). (For more information: Carlos Martin Ruiz de Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322, Daniel Puglisi – Tel.: +32 229 69140)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Le Commissaire Moedas à l'inauguration de SESAME, "un projet phare de la diplomatie scientifique"

Le commissaire en charge de la recherche, de la science et de l'innovation Carlos **Moedas** a participé aujourd'hui à la cérémonie d'inauguration de

l'accélérateur de particules SESAME ("Synchrotron Light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East"), à Allan, en Jordanie, en présence de sa Majesté le Roi de Jordanie et des représentants de 17 pays partenaires, ainsi que de l'UNESCO, de l'AIEA et du CERN. Le Commissaire a souligné le fort engagement de l'Union européenne dans ce projet, centre de recherche le plus avancé du Proche-Orient et symbole de la collaboration pacifique entre les pays de la région. *"SESAME est la preuve la plus incontestable que la diplomatie scientifique est synonyme d'excellence et représente un outil incomparable pour améliorer les relations entre les pays, les régions et les cultures en promouvant la paix et la stabilité dans la région. La science est un langage universel qui permet d'ouvrir des canaux de communication et de construire des relations de confiance. Je suis fier que l'Union européenne apporte son soutien à ce projet phare de la diplomatie scientifique"*, a déclaré le Commissaire. Demain, mercredi, le commissaire **Moedas** continuera sa visite au Proche-Orient et rencontrera à Jérusalem le Premier ministre israélien Benjamin Netanyahu et le ministre de l'Economie Eli Cohen. Après une rencontre avec des étudiants à l'université Ben Gourion de Beer-Sheva, il visitera le Cyber Teck Park de la ville. Il participera le soir à une réception en l'honneur des 10 ans du Conseil européen de la recherche (ERC). Plus d'informations sur SESAME et l'engagement de l'UE [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Lucia Caudet – Tel.: + 32 229 56182; Mirna Talko – Tel.: +32 229 87278; Maud Noyon – Tel.: +32 229 80379)

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