

Remarks by President Jean-Claude Juncker at the joint press point with Jüri Ratas, Prime Minister of Estonia, and Vice-President Andrus Ansip upon the visit of the Estonian government to the European Commission

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Vice-President and myself, we are delighted to welcome Jüri and his government here today to lay the foundations for the first ever Estonian Presidency. It is a good moment in the Estonian history and it will be a good moment for the European Union.

I have my experiences with Presidencies. I had to chair the Council and the European Council five times in my life, and so I know that the Presidencies of smaller countries are by far more successful than those of big countries. And I am really impressed by the good preparation we have noted today of the Estonian government for this major task. 1,300 Estonian officials are involved in the Presidency. That is a huge number because that is 1% of the entire population of Estonia – and so I am sure that this Presidency will be a success.

Estonia is a country I like very much. I paid two official visits to Estonia: the first time I was there, Mart Laar was the Prime Minister. The second time I was there, Andrus was the Prime Minister. And what I do not like in Estonia is that the policy-makers are as young as they are. Mart Laar was young; Andrus – who is my good friend – is closer to me when it comes to this stupid comparison. And now Jüri is the youngest Prime Minister we have in Europe. He was born in '78, and I got married in '79. You do not remember it, but I remember it. So I am very happy to go back to Estonia by the end of June.

I like Estonia and the Prime Minister, because he is like his country: young, forward-looking, pro-European, digital, and ahead of his time. You have to prove it.

Estonia has great ambitions and rightly so. Estonia, in many respects, is an example for the other Member States of the European Union. And although Estonia only joined in 2004, Estonia is behaving like a founding member of the European Union, whereas some founding members are behaving like brand new members of the European Union. So we are looking to this Presidency with great hope and great expectation.

We have seen in our conversation today that the Estonian government – as far as its agenda and programme is concerned – is very much in line with the

ideas and the initiatives of the Commission, is ready to deliver on the Working Programme the Commission, the Council and Parliament have concluded. And we would like Estonia to focus on digital, because Estonia has a real outstanding expertise when it comes to digital, and so we are in safe hands. The same applies to energy efficiency and renewable energy where Estonia too is a model for others.

I would leave it with Jüri to explain what he has in mind and then to Andrus to explain what we think about that.

Questions and Answers

Q1. Which one of these two do you think is the greater challenge for the Estonian Presidency: reforming the Common European Asylum System – in which we have not seen much progress in the past two Presidencies – or keeping the Brexit negotiations on track? How big do you think the Estonian influence will actually be?

President Juncker: I think that digital is the most important performance Estonia could give as a gift, knowing what is what, to the European Union. Brexit is an important issue, but we have a Chief Negotiator, so there will be no negotiations between the Presidency and the British in a direct, intimate way; this will be done by the Chief Negotiator. The second point you mentioned was the asylum reform – that is important.

Q2. To the Prime Minister: this morning, the Brexit Minister David Davies threatened – or suggested, maybe I should say – that he might walk out of negotiations. Will you be able to keep the EU 27 together and supporting the Chief Negotiator, Michel Barnier? President Juncker, yesterday Theresa May said: "The next person to find out that I am a bloody difficult woman will be Jean-Claude Juncker". I was wondering if you have any response to that sort of rhetoric.

President Juncker: I am not using this rhetoric, because in different translations it could mean different things. I deeply respect the British Prime Minister; I like her as a person. I have noted that she is a tough lady – so this is not for the future, this is a real-time description. And I do not think that David was right when he was threatening that he would be ready to go out. My experience in politics always was that those who were going out had to come back.

[Eurobarometer survey shows](#)

overwhelming public support for EU role in emergency response

88% of respondents felt it important that the EU fund humanitarian aid activities and 90% said it was important that the EU help to coordinate the response to disasters in the EU through its civil protection role. Most EU citizens (56%) do not think their own country has sufficient means to deal with all major disasters on their own.

“The 2017 results show a continuing and overwhelming level of public support for EU action on humanitarian aid and civil protection. The European Union is a global humanitarian leader. When a disaster hits, there are no borders and the public support the EU helping in emergency response both at home and abroad. I am determined that the Commission will continue to deliver on this vote of confidence by European citizens”, said **Christos Stylianides**, Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management.

Key results

- **Humanitarian Aid:** 88% of respondents felt it important that the EU fund humanitarian aid activities. Asked about the current pressure on Europe’s public finances, 84% supported the continued funding of EU humanitarian aid (a similar result to 2015), and 66% felt the humanitarian aid was more efficient provided by the EU than by individual countries. An overwhelming majority (91%) also believe that EU should fund education for children and young people caught up in crises, and 86% support the sending of EU volunteers abroad.
- **Civil Protection:** 90% of Europeans said it was important that the EU help to coordinate the response to disasters in the EU through its civil protection role and 80% feel that if the emergency were to occur in their country, they would expect another EU country to help. 86% also believe that the EU should help *any country* in the world hit by disasters by sending experts and equipment. A large majority (87%) also believes that there should be an EU civil protection policy, as crises can have an impact across borders, and 81% think that a coordinated EU action in dealing with disasters is more effective than actions by individual countries – a stable result since 2015.
- **Prevention and preparedness for disasters:** almost half of Europeans (49%) do not think that enough is being done at a regional level or within their own countries to prevent or prepare for emergencies.
- **Public awareness:** EU citizens also show a high level (71%) of awareness of EU humanitarian aid activities and significant awareness (55%) about EU’s coordination role in response to disasters in the EU.

Background:

The EU as a whole – the European Commission together with the Member States – is the world's largest humanitarian aid donor. The European Commission provides life-saving assistance around the world. This assistance is carried out in partnership with UN agencies, NGOs and international organisations such as the Red Cross.

In addition, the EU helps to coordinate the response to disasters. The EU Civil Protection Mechanism facilitates cooperation in disaster response, preparedness, and prevention among 34 European states (EU-28 plus Iceland, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey). With the support of the Commission, the participating states pool the resources that can be made available to disaster-stricken countries all over the world. When activated, the Mechanism coordinates the provision of assistance.

The special Eurobarometer surveys on humanitarian aid and civil protection (reports 453 and 454) were carried out in the 28 EU Member States between the 26 November and 5 December 2016. Some 27 929 respondents were interviewed face-to-face.

For more information:

[Report/Summary/Country Factsheets for 2017 Eurobarometer on humanitarian aid](#)

[ECHO Factsheet – humanitarian aid](#)

[Report/Summary/Country Factsheets for 2017 Eurobarometer on civil protection](#)

[ECHO Factsheet – civil protection](#)

[**Article – World Press Freedom Day: fake news and how to spot it**](#)

World Press Freedom Day is marked every year on 3 May, but there is little reason to celebrate as journalists continue to be repressed and persecuted all over the world. The challenges facing the press are discussed by Parliament's human rights subcommittee on Thursday morning, with a special focus on the growing threat of disinformation. Check out our handy guide on how to spot fake news.

The internet has created new opportunities for the media, but it has also made it easier to deliberately spread fabricated news stories to fool readers. Parliament President Antonio Tajani called attention to the issue in a statement: "When we consider press freedom, we also have to look at the internet. It is a source of knowledge as much as it is a source of concern. Almost half of all Europeans get their news from social media. This has made

spreading fake news far too easy. There are mounting concerns over disinformation and hate speech, used to promote radicalisation and fundamentalism, particularly among young people.”

During the debate on 4 May, members of the human rights subcommittee are to discuss the [World Press Freedom index](#) compiled by Reporters without Borders as well the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) activities in the field of media freedom and how the EU is reacting to disinformation and fake news.

ESMA statement to ECON Hearing on CRA Regulation

ESMA’s [statement](#) outlines the work it has undertaken in relation to the Credit Rating Agencies (CRA) Regulation and provides an update on the state of play on a number of initiatives, these include:

- European Ratings Platform;
 - Fees;
 - Transparency on structured finance instruments;
 - Reducing over-reliance on credit ratings;
 - Competition issues;
 - Sanctions; and
 - the endorsement regime.
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Press release – EU-NATO relations: debate with NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg on Wednesday – Committee on Foreign Affairs – Subcommittee on Security and Defence

EU-NATO cooperation on common challenges such as security, defence, cyber-warfare or migration will be debated by Foreign Affairs and Defence MEPs with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on Wednesday at 15.00.

Back in July 2016 the Presidents of the European Council and the European Commission, Donald Tusk and Jean-Claude Juncker respectively, and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg signed a joint [declaration on EU-NATO](#)

[cooperation](#). It enshrines deeper relations between the two organisations on cybersecurity, migration, strategic communication, resilience, situational awareness and response to hybrid threats.

The European Parliament backed closer relations between the EU and NATO in its recent resolutions on the [European Defence Union](#) and [the implementation of Common foreign and security policy](#).

The meeting will be web-streamed. You can follow the debate via [EP Live](#).

The debate will take place in Paul-Henri Spaak (3C050) room.