

Vice-President Dombrovskis' remarks at the press conference on Investing in People, Social Cohesion & Values

Dear colleagues,

Good afternoon,

From the first day, this Commission has promised to propose a budget which 'protects, empowers and defends'. Today, we want to highlight some of the programmes that make that promise concrete.

As you know, the context of next Multiannual Financial Framework negotiations this time around is probably more difficult than ever before – if such a thing is even possible. With the UK leaving the EU, the income side had to be revisited, including through new own resources. With plenty of new challenges that need to be addressed, we also had to prioritise expenses.

The package we put forward today reflects the widely shared ambitions for a social and fair Europe, as highlighted at the Gothenburg social summit of November 2017. Concretely, it allows us to more effectively support progress on the European Pillar of Social Rights, which guides our policies in this field.

The priority is to invest in people, assure them Europe is on their side. If we get the new funding to match social needs more closely, the EU can make a real difference in empowering people to meet today's challenges and prepare them for tomorrow.

That is the logic behind all of the proposals we present today.

We propose an integrated European Social Fund Plus to boost cohesion, to improve the employability and the skills of our labour force, and also to focus on those who need it most. We want to tighten the link with the European Semester, in order to support the pace of structural reforms in Member States, in full complementarity with the Reform Support Programme.

Besides, the new European Globalisation Adjustment Fund is our way of reacting to profound changes brought about by shifts and shocks in the global economy.

Commissioner Thyssen will explain more in detail what the changes imply for the ESF+ and the EGF.

We also propose a revamped Erasmus programme, our "classic". With doubled funding, this programme will be even more effective to enable millions of young Europeans to study, train or learn abroad while broadening their experience and awareness of Europe, and increasing their future chances on the job market.

Investing in people also means focusing on culture, which also helps to address societal and economic challenges. The EU budget should therefore also promote common values and a sense of belonging to the EU.

The goal of the new Creative Europe programme is to strengthen and protect European cultural and linguistic diversity, cultural heritage and creativity, as well as the competitiveness of Europe's cultural and creative sectors.

Commissioners Navracsics and Gabriel will elaborate on the proposals for Erasmus+ and Creative Europe in a moment.

Let me finish with a few words on the new Justice, Rights and Values Fund. Open, democratic and inclusive societies are at the heart of Europe's identity.

With this fund we propose to invest €947 million over 7 years, while simplifying the existing programmes in this field. The Fund consists of two programmes: the Rights and Values programme (€642 million) and the Justice programme (€305 million).

The idea behind the latter is to further support the development of a European Area of Justice based on the rule of law and mutual trust. It will support, for instance, judicial training or mutual learning programmes, and the use of Information and Communication Technologies in our justice systems.

The Rights and Values programme is focussed on protecting and promoting rights and values as enshrined in the EU Treaties. This includes supporting civil society organisations and NGO's.

At a time where we are confronted with extremism, radicalism and societal divisions, it is even more important to stand up for our common EU values, and to ensure people can truly enjoy their rights in our Union.

With that, I now pass the floor to Marianne.

Mergers: Commission confirms approval of acquisition of Dutch cable TV operator Ziggo by Liberty Global, subject to conditions

Before the transaction, Ziggo and Liberty Global were separate cable TV operators providing mainly fixed telecommunications services, with non-overlapping activities in the Netherlands. In particular, they operated in different parts of the Netherlands and did not compete for the same

customers. The merger between both companies was notified to the Commission in March 2014 and approved in October 2014, subject to conditions. This approval was then annulled by the General Court in October 2017 for procedural reasons.

Following a new investigation, the European Commission has confirmed its approval of the acquisition of Dutch cable TV operator Ziggo by Liberty Global, subject to conditions.

The Commission's competition concerns

In 2014 the Commission had concerns that the merger, as initially notified, would have hindered competition by removing two close competitors and important competitive forces in the Dutch market for the wholesale of premium Pay TV film channels. In order to maintain effective competition for the wholesale of premium Pay TV film channels in the Netherlands, Liberty Global committed to divest its Film1 channel to a third party purchaser. The channel was divested to Sony.

In its new assessment, the Commission confirmed its concerns that the merger, as initially notified, would have increased Liberty Global's negotiating power *vis-à-vis* TV channel broadcasters, hindering innovation in the delivery of audio visual content over the internet (the so-called *over-the-top* or "OTT" services). The renewed approval is therefore again conditional upon the implementation of a commitments package.

The proposed remedies

To address the Commission's competition concerns, Liberty Global offered commitments similar to those offered in 2014, in particular:

- to terminate clauses in channel carriage agreements that limit broadcasters' ability to offer their channels and content over the internet, and
- not to include such clauses in future channel carriage agreements for eight years from today's decision;
- to maintain adequate interconnection capacity through at least three uncongested routes into its Internet network in the Netherlands, helping to ensure sufficient capacity for competing OTT services, also for eight years from today's decision;
- not to re-acquire the Film1 channel, to ensure that this divestment is a structural change to the market.

The Commission concluded that the proposed transaction, as modified by the commitments, would no longer raise competition concerns. The decision is conditional upon full compliance with the commitments.

The re-assessment of the transaction

Today's Commission decision follows a re-assessment of the merger, which was initially notified on 14 March 2014 and approved by the Commission on 10 October 2014, subject to certain conditions.

On 26 October 2017, the General Court annulled the Commission's decision, on the ground that the Commission did not fully state the reasons of its conclusion that the merger would not lead to vertical anti-competitive effects on the potential market for premium pay TV sports channels. The reassessment confirmed that there are no concerns on this possible market and this is fully motivated in today's decision.

In order to comply with the judgment and in line with Article 10(5) of the [EU Merger Regulation](#), the Commission has undertaken a re-assessment of the entire transaction, including all affected markets, under current market conditions.

Companies and products

Liberty Global, based in the UK, owns and operates cable networks and some mobile networks worldwide. It offers television, broadband internet, mobile and telephony services as well as mobile services. Today, Liberty Global is active in the Netherlands via its joint venture with Vodafone – VodafoneZiggo.

Ziggo, based in the Netherlands, owned and operated a cable network at the time of the approval of the decision in 2014. The network covers more than half of the Netherlands, including the third and fourth biggest cities, Den Haag and Utrecht. Ziggo provided digital and analogue cable video, broadband internet, mobile telephony and digital telephony (VoIP) services. In 2016, Ziggo became part of the newly formed joint venture VodafoneZiggo.

Merger control rules and procedures

In line with EU merger rules, the Commission received a supplementary notification of the merger on 4 April 2018.

The Commission has the duty to assess mergers and acquisitions involving companies with a turnover above certain thresholds (see Article 1 of the [Merger Regulation](#)) and to prevent concentrations that would significantly impede effective competition in the EEA or any substantial part of it.

The vast majority of notified mergers do not pose competition problems and are cleared after a routine review. From the moment a transaction is notified, the Commission generally has a total of 25 working days to decide whether to grant approval (Phase I) or to start an in-depth investigation (Phase II).

More information will be available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the [public case register](#) under the case number [M.7000](#).

EU budget: A new Social Fund, Globalisation Adjustment Fund and Justice, Rights and Values Fund

For the period 2021-2027, the European Social Fund Plus would be worth €101.2 billion, and the Globalisation Adjustment Fund €1.6 billion. Both are geared to invest in people: ensuring they are equipped with the right skills needed to deal with challenges and changes on the labour market, following up on the European Pillar of Social Rights. The Justice, Rights and Values Fund will be worth €947 million over 7 years. It will further support the development of a European Area of Justice based on the rule of law and mutual trust and ensure people can enjoy their rights.

Vice-President for the Euro, Social Dialogue, Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, Valdis **Dombrovskis**: *“These proposals follow the fundamental questions we have been asking since the White Paper on the future of Europe and subsequent reflection papers: what European Union do we want, how will we shape it, and how do we pay for it? Our ambitions for a more social Europe are fully reflected: we need EU funding to fit our policies both to pro-actively support the most vulnerable in our societies, and to react when globalisation and digitisation make their impact felt.”*

Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne **Thyssen**, said: *“Europe wants to empower people. We put our money where our mouth is. Our new, flexible and simplified social funds are focused on investing in people: to make sure they have the right skills, to make sure they have modern social protection adapted to new forms of work, and to show solidarity with those who need it most.”*

Vytenis **Andriukaitis**, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, stressed that: *“Health is a fundamental value therefore it makes sense that the future EU budget envisions integrating the Health programme in ESF+ under the cluster of “values”. This will lead to new and stronger synergies with the other building blocks of the European Pillar of Social Rights and will allow better coordination of health related investments. It will also support health promotion and disease prevention, improving effectiveness, accessibility and resilience of health systems as well as reducing health inequalities and making healthcare better and safer for the benefit of patients and society at large.”*

Věra **Jourová**, Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality said: *“With today’s proposal for a new Justice, Rights and Values Fund, we make sure we can give the best support possible for initiatives upholding EU rights, values and the rule of law.*

At a time where European societies are confronted with extremism, radicalism and divisions, it is more important than ever to promote, strengthen and defend justice, rights and EU values. NGOs and civil society play a crucial role in standing up for these European values. At the same time we need to

support Member States in our joint effort to improve judicial cooperation and increase mutual trust in our common area of justice.”

1. A European Social Fund Plus

The European Social Fund Plus will focus on investment in people and support the delivery of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#). This helps to respond to global challenges, maintain social fairness but also to drive Europe's competitiveness forward. The European Social Fund Plus will be a more flexible and simpler version of the current European Social Fund by merging a number of existing funds and programmes. Pooling resources will allow the EU and Member States to provide more integrated and targeted support in response to the social and labour market challenges that people in Europe face today. For instance, integrating support to the most deprived into the ESF+ will benefit eligible persons through a better mix of material assistance and comprehensive social support.

Specifically, the European Social Fund Plus will merge:

The main features of the new Fund are:

- **Putting citizens' concerns and key priorities at the centre:** In consultation with Member States, resources will be allocated to measures that address key priorities and Europeans' concerns. The ESF+ programmes will concentrate in particular on challenges identified under the [European Semester](#) and the European Pillar of Social Rights;
- **A focus on youth unemployment and social inclusion:** Member States with a high rate of young people not in employment, education or training will have to dedicate a minimum of 10% of the ESF+ funding to support youth employment. The Fund will continue to contribute to the [Skills Agenda for Europe](#) and at least 25% of ESF+ funding should be allocated to measures fostering social inclusion and targeting those most in need. The ESF+ will also support Member States efforts to integrate legally present non-EU nationals into their labour markets and societies by focusing on measures that foster long-term integration. In this way, it complements the Asylum and Migration Fund which supports short-term integration measures;
- **Cutting red tape:** The Commission proposes to make the rules less complex in the next long-term EU budget with less red tape and easier access to funding from different sources for authorities, citizens or organisations benefitting from EU support;
- **Tailored support to healthcare:** the health strand will focus on the priority areas where EU cooperation has a proven benefit: strengthening cross-border crisis-preparedness, assisting Member States' health authorities, digitising health and care, supporting EU health legislation and enhancing cross-border cooperation, for instance on rare and complex diseases via the European Reference Networks.

2. The post-2020 European Globalisation Adjustment Fund

The European Globalisation Adjustment Fund will be revised so that it can intervene more effectively to support workers who have lost their jobs.

Currently, workers can only get support from the Fund when their dismissals are due to changing trade patterns or consequences of the financial and economic crisis. Under the new rules, other reasons for restructuring, such as automation, digitalisation and more, can be eligible for support, taking account of new challenges on the labour market.

The new rules will also lower the threshold of dismissed workers for a case to be eligible from 500 to 250, which will allow more workers to get support. Other proposed changes include an improved mobilisation process to simplify and speed up the procedures. Finally, the Fund's co-financing rate, which currently stands at 60%, will be aligned with the highest ESF+ co-financing rates for a given Member State. In several cases this would mean that the EU co-finances a higher share of the total cost.

3. EU Justice, Rights and Values Fund

The Commission is also proposing a new Justice, Rights and Values Fund, comprising of the Rights and Values, and Justice programmes. The Fund has a proposed budget allocation of €947 million over the 7 years, €642 million for the Rights and Values programme and €305 million for the Justice programme.

At a time where European societies are confronted with extremism, radicalism and divisions, it is more important than ever to promote, strengthen and defend justice, rights, and EU values. For instance, this programme will help fight inequalities and discrimination, better protect children, and improve judicial cooperation to better fight criminality and terrorism. The Fund will contribute to the further development of a European area of justice based on the rule of law, on mutual recognition and mutual trust. It will also enhance and support the key role of Non-Governmental Organisations and civil society in promoting, safeguarding and awareness raising for EU common values and ensuring people can enjoy their rights.

The creation of the new Fund represents a simplification as compared to the current situation of 3 programmes. In particular, the area of citizenship, which is currently dealt with by 2 different programmes, will be covered by the new Rights and Values programme.

Next steps

A swift agreement on the overall long-term EU budget and its sectoral proposals is essential to ensure that EU funds start delivering results on the ground as soon as possible.

Delays similar to the ones experienced at the beginning of the current 2014-2020 budgetary period would mean that 100,000 EU-funded projects could not start on time; that many people in need of support, including urgent material and food assistance, would have to wait unnecessarily; that trainings, increased job opportunities, actions to improve the quality of key services would be delivered late, or that schools would not be able to implement new quality educational programmes in time for the school year.

An agreement on the next long-term budget in 2019 would provide for a

seamless transition between the current long-term budget (2014-2020) and the new one and would ensure predictability and continuity of funding to the benefit of all.

Background

The European Social Fund is Europe's oldest and main instrument to invest in people.

It was established together with the Treaty of Rome in 1957. Today it is an important driver of job creation, promoting better education, more modern public administrations and social inclusion, and therefore a means of ensuring fairer opportunities for all citizens.

The European Globalisation Adjustment Fund is an expression of EU solidarity with European workers who lost their jobs because of the impact of the combination of changing global trade patterns and technological change. Its objective is to retain or reintegrate workers into the labour market.

Today's proposals related to ESF+, EGF and the Justice, Rights and Values Fund are part of the [Commission's proposals for the long-term EU budget adopted by the Commission on 2 May 2018](#). The Commission's proposal for the ESF+ is closely related to the proposal for a [Common Provisions Regulation](#) adopted on 29 May 2018 which establishes the framework for action for a number of EU shared management Funds.

For More Information

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Specifically, the European Social Fund Plus will merge:

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- **A focus on youth unemployment and social inclusion:** Member States with a high rate of young people not in employment, education or training will have to dedicate a minimum of 10% of the ESF+ funding to support youth employment. The Fund will continue to contribute to the [Skills Agenda for Europe](#) and at least 25% of ESF+ funding should be allocated to measures fostering social inclusion and targeting those most in need. The ESF+ will also support Member States efforts to integrate legally present non-EU nationals into their labour markets and societies by focusing on measures that foster long-term integration. In this way, it complements the Asylum and Migration Fund which supports short-term integration measures;
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2. The post-2020 European Globalisation Adjustment Fund

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The new rules will also lower the threshold of dismissed workers for a case to be eligible from 500 to 250, which will allow more workers to get support. Other proposed changes include an improved mobilisation process to simplify and speed up the procedures. Finally, the Fund's co-financing rate, which currently stands at 60%, will be aligned with the highest ESF+ co-financing rates for a given Member State. In several cases this would mean that the EU co-finances a higher share of the total cost.

3. EU Justice, Rights and Values Fund

The Commission is also proposing a new Justice, Rights and Values Fund, comprising of the Rights and Values, and Justice programmes. The Fund has a proposed budget allocation of €947 million over the 7 years, €642 million for the Rights and Values programme and €305 million for the Justice programme.

At a time where European societies are confronted with extremism, radicalism and divisions, it is more important than ever to promote, strengthen and defend justice, rights, and EU values. For instance, this programme will help fight inequalities and discrimination, better protect children, and improve judicial cooperation to better fight criminality and terrorism. The Fund will contribute to the further development of a European area of justice based on the rule of law, on mutual recognition and mutual trust. It will also enhance and support the key role of Non-Governmental Organisations and civil society in promoting, safeguarding and awareness raising for EU common values and ensuring people can enjoy their rights.

The creation of the new Fund represents a simplification as compared to the current situation of 3 programmes. In particular, the area of citizenship, which is currently dealt with by 2 different programmes, will be covered by the new Rights and Values programme.

Next steps

A swift agreement on the overall long-term EU budget and its sectoral proposals is essential to ensure that EU funds start delivering results on the ground as soon as possible.

Delays similar to the ones experienced at the beginning of the current 2014-2020 budgetary period would mean that 100,000 EU-funded projects could not start on time; that many people in need of support, including urgent material and food assistance, would have to wait unnecessarily; that trainings, increased job opportunities, actions to improve the quality of key services would be delivered late, or that schools would not be able to implement new quality educational programmes in time for the school year.

An agreement on the next long-term budget in 2019 would provide for a seamless transition between the current long-term budget (2014-2020) and the new one and would ensure predictability and continuity of funding to the benefit of all.

Background

The European Social Fund is Europe's oldest and main instrument to invest in people.

It was established together with the Treaty of Rome in 1957. Today it is an important driver of job creation, promoting better education, more modern public administrations and social inclusion, and therefore a means of ensuring fairer opportunities for all citizens.

The European Globalisation Adjustment Fund is an expression of EU solidarity with European workers who lost their jobs because of the impact of the combination of changing global trade patterns and technological change. Its objective is to retain or reintegrate workers into the labour market.

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EU Justice, Rights and Values Fund

[IP/18/3923](#)

The fund comprises the Rights and Values, and Justice programmes. The Fund has a proposed budget allocation of 947 million EUR over the seven years, 642 million EUR for the Rights and Values programme and 305 million EUR for the Justice programme. The overall allocation is roughly equivalent to the previous period budget allocation.

The Fund will support the activities of a number of actors in the field of rights and values such as NGOs, equality bodies, public administrations, judicial networks or universities.

What are the changes to the current set-up?

The creation of a Justice, Rights and Values Fund and its two underlying programmes represent a simplification as compared to the current situation of three programmes.

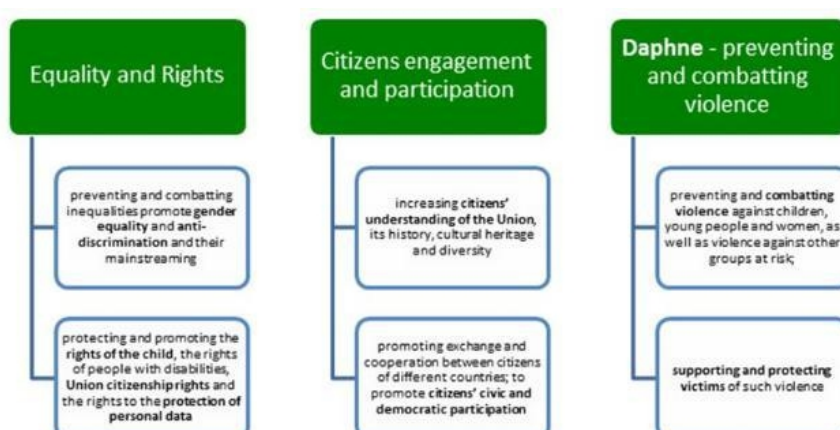
In particular, the area of citizenship, which is dealt with currently by two different programmes, will be covered by the new Rights and Values programme only, which will allow developing synergies.

Rights and Values Programme

The Rights and Values programme aims at protecting and promoting rights and values as enshrined in the EU Treaties, including by supporting civil society organisations, in order to sustain open, democratic and inclusive societies.

The programme has three specific objectives:

- to promote equality and rights (Equality and rights strand)
- to promote citizens engagement and participation in the democratic life of the Union (Citizens' engagement and participation strand)
- to fight violence (Daphne strand)



What sort of activities will be funded under the Rights and Values Programme?

- **awareness raising and training** to improve the knowledge of the policies and rights in the areas covered by the Programme including awareness of European culture, history and remembrance;
- **mutual learning** among stakeholders to improve knowledge and mutual understanding and civic and democratic engagement as well as **town-twinning activities** to bring together Europeans of different nationalities and cultures;
- **analytical and monitoring activities** to improve the understanding of the situation in the Member States and at EU level as well as to improve the implementation of EU law and policies;
- **support to civil society organisations** encouraging and facilitating active participation in the construction of a more democratic Union as well as awareness of rights and values;
- **developing the capacity of European networks** to promote and further develop Union law, policy goals and strategies as well as supporting civil society organisations active in the areas covered by the Programme.

The Justice Programme

The Justice programme aims at contributing to the further development of a European area of justice based on the rule of law, on mutual recognition and mutual trust;

More specifically the Justice programme will:

- facilitate and support **judicial cooperation in civil and criminal matters** and promote the **rule of law**, for instance by supporting the efforts to improve the **effectiveness of national justice systems** and the enforcement of decisions;
- support and promote **judicial training**, with a view to fostering a common legal, judicial and rule of law culture;
- facilitate **effective access to justice** for all and effective redress; it will promote efficient civil and criminal procedures, promote and support the rights of victims of crime as well as the procedural rights of suspects and accused persons in criminal proceedings.

What sort of activities will be funded under the Justice Programme?

- **awareness raising and training**: it will help relevant stakeholders to improve the knowledge of Union policies and law, for instance on substantive and procedural law, judicial cooperation instruments, or relevant case-law of the European Court of Justice;
- **mutual learning** through exchange of good practices among stakeholders to improve mutual understanding of the civil and criminal law and the legal and judicial systems of the Member States, including the rule of law;
- **analytical and monitoring activities** to improve the knowledge and understanding of potential obstacles to the smooth functioning of a European area of justice;
- **development and use of information and Communication Technology (ICT)** to

improve the efficiency of judicial systems and their cooperation and the cross-border interoperability of systems and applications.

- **developing capacity** of key European level networks as well as supporting civil society organisations active in the areas covered by the Programme.

How will NGOs be supported?

The role of Civil Society Organisations is very important for the implementation of the Justice Rights and Values Fund. In particular the Rights and Values programme will aim to protect and promote rights and values as enshrined in the EU Treaties, including by supporting civil society organisations, in order to sustain open, democratic and inclusive societies.

It will fund NGOs to promote activities under its three specific objectives, in continuity with the current practice. This includes for instance projects to fight violence against women, to promote the rights of the child or remembrance projects.

The programme will also fund activities to encourage and facilitate active participation in the construction of a more democratic Union as well as awareness of rights and values through support to civil society organisations, including NGOs and think tanks.

In addition, the Justice Programme will also support civil society organisations, for instance to facilitate effective access to justice for all.

How does the Fund relate to the new mechanism the Commission proposed on rule of law in the Multi Annual Financial Framework?

The proposed Regulation equips the Union to better protect its budget when weaknesses in the rule of law impair – or threaten to impair – sound financial management or the financial interests of the Union.

The role of the Fund is different, it is to promote policies in line with fundamental rights and European values. It will further support the development of a European Area of Justice based on the rule of law and mutual trust and ensure people can enjoy their rights.