

# 2017 Western Balkans Summit – stepping up regional cooperation to advance on the European Union path

The 2017 Western Balkans Summit will take place on 12 July in Trieste, Italy. The Summit will serve as an important occasion to work together on strengthening concrete opportunities while fostering regional cooperation with the aim of developing inclusive societies, good governance and vibrant economies, hence also further advancing the European Union integration perspective of the region.

Federica **Mogherini**, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission, Johannes **Hahn** Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, and Violeta **Bulc**, Commissioner for Transport, will participate together with Heads of Government, Foreign Ministers, Ministers of Economy and Ministers of Transport of the Western Balkans and their counterparts from 6 EU Member States (Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, and Slovenia).

Discussions will focus on three key areas of regional cooperation: 1) Connectivity, 2) Regional economic integration/private sector development and 3) People-to-people contacts.

- In the area of connectivity, focus will be on the implementation of the Connectivity Agenda, which aims at creating conditions for economic growth and good neighbourly relations, in particular through the preparation and financing of concrete regional infrastructure investment projects in the transport and energy sectors. During the Summit, the European Commission will announce substantial new funding as part of its annual 'connectivity package'. Moreover, the Western Balkans partners are expected to sign the Transport Community Treaty, which will help integrate the transport networks in the region and with the EU and guide related reform measures in the transport sector.
- On regional economic integration, the Western Balkan partners are expected to agree on an action plan to develop a Regional Economic Area aimed at boosting the attractiveness of the region to encourage investment and generate jobs, especially through smart growth, start-ups and scale-ups. For the first time within the Berlin process, a digital dimension is part of the action plan: this will contribute to integrating the region into the pan-European digital market. The Chamber Investment Forum of the Western Balkans, which gathers chambers of commerce of the region, will inaugurate its Permanent Secretariat in Trieste at the margin of the Summit: the involvement of the business community will contribute to translating the Regional Economic Area into concrete opportunities for companies in the region. On private sector development, the Commission will step up its substantial existing support to SMEs through a new contribution to the Western Balkans Enterprise Development and Innovation Facility, as well as pushing for

more dynamic inward investment.

- Regarding people-to-people contacts, the European Commission together with the Italian Government is organising an [EU-Western Balkans Youth forum](#) in the margins of the Summit to take stock of the results achieved since last year and explore further areas of cooperation. The conclusions of the youth forum will be presented at the Summit. The forum and the Summit will also serve to promote participation in the Erasmus exchange programme, which is celebrating its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year and has been successfully extended to the Western Balkans. Based on the outcomes of the youth forum, the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) will further develop its work programme to foster cooperation among young people of the region. During the Summit, political leaders are further expected to reconfirm their commitment to an exchange scheme for young civil servants from the region, which was launched at last year's Western Balkans Summit in Paris and has shown very positive results. Italy is hosting the fourth annual Summit in the framework of the "Berlin Process", an initiative for regional cooperation in the Western Balkans, which follows the Summits in Berlin (2014), Vienna (2015) and Paris (2016).

**For more information:**

[Factsheet: EU Engagement in the Western Balkans](#)

[2017 Trieste Summit on the Western Balkans](#)

[EU-Western Balkans Youth forum](#)

[Civil Society Forum Trieste 2017](#)

[Western Balkans – European External Action Service](#)

[Directorate General: European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations](#)

[Directorate General – Mobility and Transport](#)

---

## **Juncker-Plan besichert durch eine Garantie den Vertrag über ein Darlehen von 150 Mio. EUR zum Ausbau der Breitbandnetze in Griechenland**

08/07/2017 – Enlargement, external relations and trade / Institutional affairs / Security and defence

G20 leaders met in Hamburg, Germany, on 7-8 July. European Council President Donald Tusk and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker represented the EU at the summit. The theme of this year's summit was 'shaping an interconnected world'.

---

## 2016 EU budget reports: generating added value out of every euro spent

The European Commission today published [three](#) reports on the implementation of the 2016 EU budget. They show that the EU budget in 2016 has helped achieve the political priorities of the European Union, has created added value for the EU citizens and was spent in line with EU rules.

Another conclusion from those reports is that simplifying EU rules is key to making it easier for local authorities, farmers or businesses to use EU funds effectively and correctly. This ties in with the [recommendations](#) of the High Level Group on simplification, also presented today, which are feeding into the [broader reflection on the future of EU finances launched](#) by Commissioner Günther H. Oettinger in June.

Günther H. **Oettinger**, in charge of budget and human resources, said: *"As the data demonstrate, the EU budget delivers concrete results, be it boosting research and innovation, supporting farmers, helping Europeans find jobs, supporting investment, fighting against climate change or providing humanitarian assistance across the world.. This is real added value that only our common EU budget can bring"*.

Below are some key achievements of the EU budget in 2016:

- The Nobel Prize in Chemistry was awarded to three scientists who have benefitted from EU funding. This made a total of 17 Nobel prize laureates, four Fields medal winners and countless discoveries with global impact linked to the EU's investment into research and innovation.
- About seven million farmers were supported with direct payments in 2016, €150 million was made available to compensate for the milk crises.
- More than 140 000 Small and Medium Enterprises in 21 countries received a total of €5.5 billion of loans from the COSME programme.
- 21% of the 2016 budget was devoted to fighting climate change.
- Over 120 million vulnerable people in more than 80 countries, including those most affected by the Syria crisis, received humanitarian aid worth over €2 billion.

- Hundreds of thousands lives saved in the Central Mediterranean alone with the joint efforts of EU Member States and the newly established European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

## Background

The three reports mark the beginning of the annual procedure by which the European Parliament assesses the way the Commission has implemented the EU budget in 2016. At the end of that procedure the Parliament decides whether to sign off the EU's accounts or not. In addition to today's reports, the Parliament will take into account the European Court of Auditors' annual report which is expected in September 2017. The Commission has received the Parliament's approval every year since 1997, and the European Court of Auditors has found that the EU accounts to be fully reliable every year since 2007.

For More Information:

- [Integrated financial reporting package – 2016 brochure](#)
- [Annual Management and Performance Report for the EU budget 2016](#)
- [EU Accounts 2016](#)
- [Commission Report on the follow-up to the discharge for the 2015 financial year](#)
- [Reflection paper on the Future of EU finances](#)
- Follow Commissioner Oettinger on [Twitter](#)

---

## [Paying for local services](#)

Since the election of the new Parliament I have concentrated on the issues of schools funding and the provision of local services. I have urged the Education Secretary to speed up the new fairer funding formula which is meant to help schools in Wokingham and other places which receive low amounts per pupil under the present arrangements. I have also urged her and the Treasury to put more money in total into English schools, to make the change easier to sell around the country.

This matter has become tied up in a much wider debate about how much money public services require, and how much we can afford to spend. Health spending is planned to rise anyway, but the NHS could always use more. The costs of social care are rising rapidly as the number of elderly with substantial needs increases. In the election voters made clear their dislike of the idea that the elderly person should have to pay by pledging the value of their home to the state on death for the costs incurred. That means we need to find

more out of general taxation to pay for social care.

Many people in the public sector would like a pay rise, after some years of pay caps limiting general rises. It is true that some have enjoyed better rises than the pay cap implies. Nurses, for example, usually qualify for six years of 4% a year rises in the form of annual increments, which have been paid during the period of restraint. Other groups too have benefited from annual increments on top of the basic rate rise. Promotion, overtime, higher pay at week-ends and other methods have been available to boost pay for some public sector employees. I think the right approach is to see what the Independent Pay Review Bodies come up with. They are meant to assess the adequacy of pay in relation to the cost of living and comparison with other workers. They have to take into account whether the public sector can recruit and retain the people it needs at the recommended pay levels. The government needs to listen carefully to their assessment of what is needed to be fair and to ensure we can continue to employ all the people we need.

The best way of paying for the additional costs of public service is through the proceeds of economic growth. As the economy grows so people earn more money on which they have to pay tax. As it grows more goods and services are bought and sold, attracting more VAT and business taxes. This has been the main source of increased revenue in recent years. We need more of the same so we can afford the better public services we all want. Going on a public sector spending and borrowing binge would damage this, as would high taxation rates.

We also need to tackle the issue of public sector quality and productivity. Something for something pay deals backed by smarter working can be a win win for taxpayers, service users and employees.

(Published in the Wokingham paper)

---

**It feels like the only policies the Tories are certain about are those that hurt ordinary people hardest**

We're only a month into this new – and pretty dismal – Tory government, yet already, every day, new evidence emerges of the impact of its policies on the lives of families and children.