

Speech by Jyrki Katainen, Vice President of the European Commission at the Leaders' Roundtable of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation

[Mr. President, your Excellencies.]

On behalf of the European Union it is a pleasure to be here in Beijing at the Belt and Road Forum, together with so many countries with an interest in enhancing connectivity.

The EU has been working with China on this issue since President Xi Jinping's visit in March 2014. We have begun to reflect on how we could extend the concept of connectivity to Asia as a whole.

Connectivity is about transcending borders. It is about openness, and the opportunity that brings. And addressing the concerns that people have.

The last year has seen rising pressure in many of our countries – and elsewhere – to reverse the tide of globalisation. But we know that tides cannot be stopped. We should focus instead on channelling globalisation into improving our lives – and making sure there is space in the boat for all our citizens.

Last week the European Commission published its own reflection paper on 'harnessing globalisation'. This made clear that we see the future in terms of rules-based trade and investment. We want to work with our partners to ensure we keep markets open on a reciprocal basis to ensure sustainable and inclusive growth.

Through investments of up to ten trillion dollars per year in transport, energy, and communications networks, we are essentially rewiring the planet. Asia has important infrastructure needs and it is in Europe's interest to contribute.

China is at one end of the 'Belt and Road' – Europe is at the other. Done the right way, more investment in cross-border links could unleash huge growth potential with benefits for us all.

The European Union is already one of the biggest trade and investment partners of all Asian countries. Our economic prosperity is deeply interdependent – both ways.

We welcomed President Xi Jinping's speeches at Davos and Geneva, and his commitments on behalf of China to free trade, multilateralism and sustainable development.

More than ever, we must all work together to put these principles into practice, and to uphold the rules-based international system which underpins our the prosperity and security of all our citizens.

If we get it right, 21st century connectivity can also help the poorer parts of the world get a fairer share of the proceeds of globalisation. And it can bring the kind of economic development that helps to address the root causes of migration.

For connectivity to fulfil this promise, any scheme to connect Europe and Asia should adhere to the following principles.

- It should be an **open initiative** based on market rules and international standards.
- It should include **all modes of transport**, as well as digital and energy and people-to-people contacts.
- It should **complement existing networks and policies**. In the EU's case, we have decades of experience with the Trans-European Networks, which are now being extended into our neighbourhood, East and South.
- European and Asian infrastructure should not be designed in isolation. We need to build a **true network and not a patchwork**.
- Infrastructure networks must be **interoperable**. We want to bring down barriers, not create new ones.
- **Transparency** on our plans and activities must be the basis for our cooperation, and all partners should have a fair say about where the priorities lie. Multilateral frameworks like ASEM, should be used wherever possible.
- **Sustainability** is essential: projects must be economically viable, fiscally and socially responsible, as well as climate and environment-friendly.
- We must use the **wisdom of the multilateral banks**, whose decades of experience makes them an invaluable partner for new institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.
- Finally, we should ensure that **there are real benefits** for all stakeholders. Not only for countries, but also for economic operators, who should have a fair chance to compete for business through open, transparent and non-discriminatory procurement procedures. A level-playing field for trade and investment is a critical condition if we want to maintain the political momentum and support for better connectivity between Europe and Asia.

The European Union is proud to work with China and other partners on improving connectivity between us. Finding synergies between our policies and projects will bring real benefits. The EU-China connectivity platform exemplifies this approach.

In times of growing tensions and geopolitical unpredictability, we all bear a

common responsibility to work together towards a more co-operative, rules-based global order that can bring our citizens together in peace and prosperity.

[The pound's value](#)

There is a lot of disinformation about rises and falls in the pound. Some would have you believe we had a stable and strong pound prior to the Brexit vote, and then it fell. The truth is somewhat different.

The crucial cross rate is the Euro rate, given the volume of imports we take from the EU. Sterling fell a lot during the banking crash of the last decade. On 3rd January 2009 it fell as low as Euro 1.04. It rallied in the next decade, typically trading around Euro 1.20 in the period 2010-2014. It hit a low of Euro 1.16 in February and August 2013.

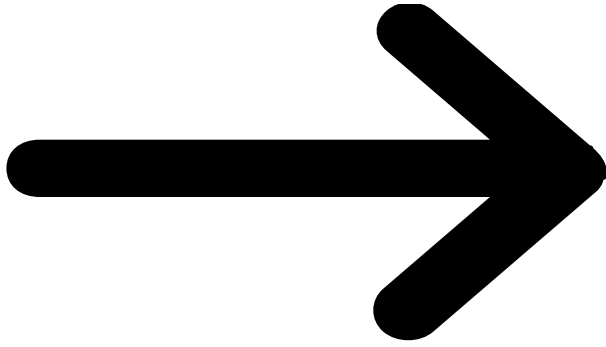
By June 14 2016, just before the vote, it was around Euro 1.25, having been higher in previous months. Today it is at Euro 1.18, just 5% down on the June pre vote low. At today's level, after rallying in recent weeks, it is around its average earlier this decade.

Published and promoted by Fraser Mc Farland on behalf of John Redwood, both at 30 Rose Street Wokingham RG40 1XU

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15 May 2017



The Scottish Conservatives have accused Nicola Sturgeon of “playing political games” with Brexit.

The SNP leader said she wanted the Scottish Government to be “at the top table in Brexit negotiations.”

At the same time, she said she wanted to strengthen her hand as she seeks to impose a second, unwanted independence referendum on Scotland.

Scottish Conservative deputy leader Jackson Carlaw said:

“The only conclusion to be reached from this is that Nicola Sturgeon has now gone entirely through the looking glass.

“Let’s be clear about what she says she now wants.

“She says she wants to decide how Brexit is designed for the whole of the UK – even though SNP Ministers want that deal to fail.

“At the same time, she also wants to impose an independence referendum campaign on Scotland to try and split the UK in two.

“It is a ridiculous position to take.

“The SNP is in a complete shambles on independence and Europe, and the cracks are now beginning to show.

“Nicola Sturgeon should stop the political games, drop her plan for an unwanted second referendum and seek to make Brexit work for all of us.

“If re-elected, a Conservative UK Government will get on with the job of delivering the best Brexit deal for all of us in the UK, including Scotland.”

Giving evidence to a Holyrood committee last week, Nicola Sturgeon’s Brexit minister, Michael Russell, predicted talks to leave the EU would fail, paving the way for independence.

Scottish Conservatives the only party of the union after ex-Lib Dem cllr pledges support

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A former Liberal Democrat councillor in Scotland's capital city has backed the Conservatives, adding "something of a revolution" is building under leader Ruth Davidson.

Alastair Shields, who represented the Lib Dems in Edinburgh's Almond ward last term, said he would now campaign for the Scottish Conservatives in Edinburgh West.

He said the party was "ticking both boxes" when it came to respecting the results of the independence and EU referendums, and "fighting hardest for the centre ground".

Mr Shields is the latest former Labour or Liberal Democrat member to switch to the Scottish Conservatives ahead of next month's election.

Pledging to get his "canvassing shoes on", he said:

"In Edinburgh West, the Scottish Conservatives appeal to the electorate because they spend more time talking about their own campaign pledges and the potential of their candidates.

"They put across a simple message: we will deliver, vote for us.

"It feels like something of a revolution is developing in Scotland. Ruth Davidson puts people and communities at the top of the agenda, leaving talk of independence behind. We've had that discussion and the Scottish people rejected it. Let's move on."

Scottish Conservative Edinburgh West candidate Sandy Batho said:

"Alastair is one of many former Labour and Lib Dem members switching their support to the Scottish Conservatives.

"That's because people want to see a party which will fight the SNP in standing up for Scotland's place in the UK, and respect last year's Brexit vote too.

"All over the country the party is making strides, and it's abundantly clear we are the only ones capable of standing up to the SNP and its divisive drive for another independence referendum."

Below are Mr Shields' remarks in full:

"For me, this election is mostly about which party is fighting hardest for the centre ground and upholding democracy at a time where it constantly appears to be challenged. Right now, the Conservatives are ticking both of these boxes leaps and bounds above the others."

"I'm not a Brexiteer, I voted Remain. I don't think anyone in the country is under any doubt the process will be tough in the years ahead and so much is still unknown. But I appreciate that leaving the EU was the greater choice of the British people and that must be respected. I accept Brexit and believe the Conservatives, under the leadership of Theresa May, stand to represent many people across the country with the same mindset."

"In Edinburgh West, the Scottish Conservatives appeal to the electorate because they spend more time talking about their own campaign pledges and the potential of their candidates. They put across a simple message: We will deliver, vote for us."

"I am looking forward to getting my canvassing shoes on for the Conservatives during this campaign. I last helped them as a student and it feels like something of a revolution is developing in Scotland."

[EU strengthens humanitarian support for Myanmar/Burma, calls for greater aid access](#)

As the first Commissioner to visit Northern Rakhine State, he called for greater access for aid organisations working in the area and visited several EU funded humanitarian projects.

"The European Union is committed to supporting those in need in Myanmar/Burma. The recent violence in Northern Rakhine State has created pressing humanitarian needs. During my visit I saw that malnutrition rates have deteriorated after the recent crisis. Our humanitarian partners are helping government authorities develop a food security and nutrition strategy for this region, but we still need better humanitarian access in order to facilitate a quick and full response by aid agencies to assist all affected communities. It is particularly important to help Rohingya civilians who have

suffered involuntary displacements as well as supporting their livelihoods.” said Commissioner **Stylianides**.

More than half a million people in Myanmar need humanitarian assistance, including almost 220 000 who are living in displacement. Over €9 million of the new EU funding will provide direct humanitarian assistance to communities living in conflict-afflicted areas (including Rakhine, Shan, and Kachin States), while another €3 million will fund disaster-risk-reduction activities to strengthen the resilience of communities at risk of natural disasters.

Since 1994, the European Commission has provided €229 million in humanitarian aid to Myanmar/Burma.

Both photo and video coverage of the visit is available on [EbS](#).

Background

The visit follows the meeting on 2nd May in Brussels of High Representative / Vice-President Federica **Mogherini** and Commissioner **Stylianides** with State Counsellor and Foreign Minister, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

In early October 2016, a deadly assault on three border guard posts in Northern Rakhine State triggered military operations which resulted in the suspension of humanitarian activities in the region. To date, more than 130 000 people who were dependant on aid remain without much-needed regular assistance.

In this region, an estimated 800 000 Rohingya people are deprived of their basic rights, and restrictions of movement seriously impact their livelihood and access to basic services. Both in the Northern Rakhine and Kachin States, humanitarian access remains a problem.

Since 1994, the European Commission’s humanitarian aid department has provided €145 million in relief assistance for victims of conflict, communal violence and epidemics, while €84 million has reached victims of natural disasters and to support Disaster Risk Reduction and Preparedness programs in the country. EU aid is channelled impartially to the affected populations, regardless of their race, ethnic group, religion, gender, age, nationality or political affiliation.

For more information

[Factsheet on Myanmar](#)

[Factsheet on the Rohingya crisis](#)