

# European Commission responds to the US restrictions on steel and aluminium affecting the EU

The European Commission takes note of the announcement by the President of the United States of the imposition of restrictions in the form of an import surcharge on EU exports to the US of steel and aluminium.

President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude **Juncker** said: *"We strongly regret this step, which appears to represent a blatant intervention to protect US domestic industry and not to be based on any national security justification. Protectionism cannot be the answer to our common problem in the steel sector. Instead of providing a solution, this move can only aggravate matters. The EU has been a close security ally of the US for decades. We will not sit idly while our industry is hit with unfair measures that put thousands of European jobs at risk. I had the occasion to say that the EU would react adequately and that's what we will do. The EU will react firmly and commensurately to defend our interests. The Commission will bring forward in the next few days a proposal for WTO-compatible countermeasures against the US to rebalance the situation."*

Commissioner for Trade Cecilia **Malmström** added: *"These US measures will have a negative impact on transatlantic relations and on global markets. In addition, they will raise costs and reduce choice for US consumers of steel and aluminium, including industries that import these commodities. The EU will seek dispute settlement consultations with the US in Geneva at the earliest opportunity. The Commission will monitor market developments and if necessary will propose WTO-compatible safeguard action to preserve the stability of the EU market. The root cause of problems in these two sectors is global overcapacity caused by non-market based production. This can only be addressed at the source and by working with the key countries involved. This go-it-alone action by the US will not help."*

## **Background**

On 1 March, President Trump announced the imposition of additional import duties on EU exports of steel and aluminium to the United States. The import duties are set at 25% on steel and 10% on aluminium. Similar restrictions will also be imposed on exports from other suppliers.

This action follows investigations undertaken between April 2017 and January 2018 by the US Department of Commerce under Section 232 of the US Trade Expansion Act of 1962. These reports concluded that steel and aluminium imports threatened US national security and recommended the imposition of trade restrictions.

However, in essence, these measures are primarily intended to protect the US domestic industry from import competition. Any national security

justification appears very weak: the US Secretary of Defence has stated publicly that US military requirements represent no more than 3% of US production and that the Department of Defence is able to acquire the steel and aluminium it needs for US national defence requirements.

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# Number of asylum decisions surpasses number of applications in EU+ countries

## **Monthly applications by Georgian citizens increased by 113% since September 2017**

Despite the issuing of a high number of asylum decisions by national asylum systems in the EU+ and a resulting decrease in backlog, nearly half a million cases remain pending.

In January 2018, some 54,000 applications for international protection were lodged in the 28 European Union Member States, plus Norway and Switzerland (EU+). Despite issuing close to 60,000 decisions in the first instance, approximately 450,000 cases were still awaiting a decision. Even though these numbers are lower than for most of 2017, the figures indicate that the asylum situation in Europe is still not completely clear from the effects of the spike in applications in 2015-2016.

Together, EU+ countries are issuing more first-instance decisions on asylum cases than the number of new applications that are being submitted, which reflects the success of the investment that Member States are making into backlog management and the continued focus on decision-making capacity in some countries. Consequently, there was a decrease in the number of pending cases, down from approximately a million in late 2016 to less than half a million at the end of January 2018.

A third of all applications for international protection in the EU+ were submitted by citizens of just five countries: Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan. The number of Syrian applicants reached the lowest monthly number since February 2014, while some other nationalities increased.

Of significance in the figures for January 2018, data shows that Georgians became the sixth most common citizenship among all applications in the first instance. The figures indicate that Georgians have been applying for asylum in increasing numbers since a Visa-Liberalisation agreement for travel in the Schengen Area took effect in March 2017. Reflecting this increase, in January 2018 applications more than doubled (an increase of 113%) the number registered four months earlier (from 874 in September 2017 to 1,859 in January 2018). Despite the increased numbers of applications and resulting pressure exerted on national systems, just 3% of Georgians who applied for asylum in the EU+ were granted either refugee status or subsidiary protection in 2017.

A recently-launched EASO interactive portal, which will shortly be updated with data from January 2018, allows users to visualise data on asylum

applications, as well as on decisions and the number of pending cases in the EU+: [www.easo.europa.eu/latest-asylum-trends](http://www.easo.europa.eu/latest-asylum-trends).

Any further information may be obtained from the European Asylum Support Office on the following email address: [press@easo.europa.eu](mailto:press@easo.europa.eu)

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## **Press release: Minister Field remarks to media at the February 2018 EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting**

Upon arrival at the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels, Minister of State Mark Field said:

We are obviously very interested in playing our part today in the Venezuelan situation which is a dreadful humanitarian, political and diplomatic situation. We are obviously very keen to be supporting the Spanish who are leading on this and we need to move towards a united front to ensure there is a fully participatory, free and fair election in Venezuela.

We are going to talk about the Middle East Peace Plan... I hope that we are going to have an agreement that we need to move ahead and ensure that there is a two-state solution but also above all that America has to be part and parcel of this process.

We are also going to talk a little bit about Moldova. Many of you know obviously in Moldova there is a programme of economic and political reform being supported by all elements of the European Union.

[Minister Mark Field at the FAC](#)

### **Further information**

- Follow Foreign Office Minister Mark Field [@MarkFieldUK](#)
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