

News story: New stealth fighter jet 'takes off'

At an event held at the Institute for Engineering and Technology, the Defence Secretary was joined by MPs and journalists to see what it is like to fly and land the pioneering fighter jet which will protect British lives around the world.

The global F-35 programme will support 20,000 UK jobs over the 30 year production period and already the programme has generated over £9 billion for UK industry. The cockpit demonstrator gave the Defence Secretary a feel for flying the new state-of-the-art stealth aircraft, allowing him to practice landing and taking off from the new aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth.

After flying the jet demonstrator, Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Today demonstrates that we are investing in our brave Armed Forces by making sure they have the very best equipment, securing tens of thousands of British manufacturing and engineering jobs, and ensuring Britain will always play a leading role in making the world a safer place.

These pioneering stealth jets will protect British lives as we face intensifying and evolving threats at home and abroad.

The F-35 is the most advanced and dynamic fighter aircraft in our history, and will defend this country from terrorists, collect crucial intelligence, and safeguard our national interests from those who seek to do us harm.

The Defence Secretary was guided through the flight by Squadron Leader Andy Edgell and Lieutenant Commander Adam Hogg, two of the UK's F-35 pilots putting the aircraft through its paces over in the United States. Alongside its short take-off and vertical landing capability, the F-35B's unique combination of stealth, cutting-edge radar, sensor technology, and electronic warfare systems provide world-beating capability of a fifth-generation fighter.

The UK currently has 14 F-35s based in the US, operated by around 150 UK personnel. These aircraft will arrive in the UK later this year at RAF Marham and initial flight trials will take place from the UK's new aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth, in autumn off the coast of the US.

During his visit to the cockpit demonstrator, the Defence Secretary also met with representatives from some of the 500 UK companies who are in the F-35 supply chain. UK industry will provide approximately 15% of each F-35 to be built and, with more than 3,000 aircraft projected, the programme will support 20,000 UK jobs over the 30 year production phase.

Lockheed Martin UK Chief Executive Peter Ruddock said:

To date, the F-35 programme has generated \$12.9 billion (pounds figure) in contracts for British suppliers and that investment will grow as we ramp up towards full rate production. The F-35 will provide the UK Armed Forces with a game-changing capability that will allow the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force to project power around the world for decades to come.

Operated jointly by the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, the F-35 Lightning jets will fly from both land bases and the UK's new aircraft carriers. The programme is on target to achieve Initial Operating Capability (IOC) by December 2018, meaning that UK F-35s will be able to operate from land bases from this point.

Following successful trials on the land based ski-ramp design, which is featured on the UK flagship carrier, and with RAF Marham runway infrastructure now complete as part of a £250m major investment programme, the UK has made significant progress over the last year in preparation for the F-35 arrival later this year.

[Press release: Environment Agency issues permit to Southern Water for Bewl reservoir](#)

The Environment Agency has issued a temporary winter drought permit to Southern Water Services Limited, to help refill Bewl Water reservoir in East Sussex.

The water company made an application on 5 January stating it needed to take more water from the River Medway to help refill Bewl Water, which was only 42% full at the start of the year.

Despite a wet December, the autumn was very dry. There was also lower-than-average rainfall across south east England during the previous winter. This prolonged dry period across the region has left many groundwater supplies and some reservoirs lower than normal for the time of year.

Bewl Water is the largest reservoir in the south east of England and can hold 31,000 million litres of water. It is an important source for Southern Water, which manages the supply of water to over 2.5 million customers across south and south east England. Southern Water already routinely takes water from the River Medway to fill the reservoir. The change to the permit will allow the

company to abstract additional water until the end of March.

The change will mean Southern Water can take water when river levels are lower than the previous limit. The water company has requested the change as part of its plan to secure public water supplies for the upcoming summer.

In determining the drought permit application, the Environment Agency has taken into account the very low rainfall, the impact this has had on water supplies, as well as considering the response to the recent public consultation.

Julie Foley, Environment Agency Area Director, said:

Although it has been wet over the past few weeks, overall this winter across south east England there has been lower-than-average amounts of rain. Consequently, we now need above average rainfall for the remainder of the winter to replenish our water resources.

The Environment Agency has to balance the water needs of people, businesses and wildlife so we have carefully considered Southern Water's application. We have decided to grant this temporary change to the existing licence, helping the company to refill the reservoir at a time of year when there will be less impact on the environment. We will carefully monitor any effects and take action if needed to ensure the environment is protected.

We encourage people to follow advice from their water company about saving water. Using water efficiently will help ensure we have enough water for people, businesses and the environment.

All media enquiries: 0800 141 2743. Or email southeastpressoffice1@environment-agency.gov.uk.

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Daily News 17 / 01 / 2018

New measures to boost key and digital competences, as well as the European dimension of education

Only two months after the [Gothenburg Summit on 17 November 2017](#), the European Commission has today adopted new initiatives to improve key and digital

competences of European citizens and to promote common values and pupils' awareness of the functioning of the European Union. They are intended to reduce socio-economic inequalities, whilst sustaining competitiveness in order to build a more united, stronger and more democratic Europe. Jyrki **Katainen**, Vice-President of the Commission for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness, said: *"Today's initiatives aim at empowering individuals so that they can make the most of their lives and so that we can build fair, resilient economies and societies.* Tibor **Navracsics**, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, said: *"Europe's education and training systems need to give people from all backgrounds the right competences to progress and prosper professionally, but also enable them to be engaged citizens. We need to harness the potential of education to foster social cohesion and a sense of belonging."* Mariya **Gabriel**, Commissioner for The Digital Economy and Society, added: *"The digital skills gap is real. While 90% of future jobs require some level of digital literacy, 44% of Europeans lack basic digital skills. The Digital Education Action Plan we propose today will help Europeans, educational institutions and education systems to better adapt to life and work in increasingly digital societies."* The new proposals will also feed into the first [European Education Summit](#) which Commissioner Navracsics will host in Brussels on 25 January. A full [press release](#), [memo](#) and [factsheets](#) are available online. (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Joseph Waldstein – Tel.: +32 229 56184)

From waste to energy: the Juncker Plan and Cohesion Policy fund innovative energy sources in Lithuania

The Commission adopted two funding decisions to support the construction of a combined heat and power plant in Vilnius designed to produce electricity and heat out of biomass and municipal waste. The plant will help diversify the Lithuanian capital's energy sources and support the transition towards a circular economy in the region. Over €139 million from the [Cohesion Fund](#) is now invested in the plant, in addition to a €190 million European Investment Bank ([EIB](#)) loan backed by the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), the heart of the [Investment Plan for Europe](#), signed in December 2016. Vice-President Jyrki **Katainen**, responsible for jobs, growth, investment and competitiveness, said: *"In Lithuania, the EFSI and Cohesion Policy funds are joining forces to support the circular economy; an innovative financing solution for equally innovative projects, turning waste to energy."* Commissioner for Regional policy Corina **Crețu** added: *"This additional support from the EU won't simply give the inhabitants of Vilnius a cleaner, greener environment to live in; they will also inspire new business ideas as the circular economy sector is abundant with opportunities for growth and innovation."* The Cohesion Fund grants are split into €90.8 million to build the biomass unit and €48.5 million for the municipal waste-to-energy facility. These projects, which should be completed in the course of 2019, will contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions generated by the waste sector in the country by roughly 10% as well as waste landfilling in the region. In line with the EU waste hierarchy, when waste cannot be recycled, recovering the energy embedded in it and injecting it back in the economy is

the next best environmental and economic option while avoiding landfilling. Investments in treatment facilities for residual waste should nevertheless be granted in limited and well justified cases, where there is no risk of overcapacity and the objectives of the waste hierarchy are fully respected. (For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tél.: +32 229 58615, Sophie Dupin de Saint-Cyr – Tél.: +32 229 56169)

Celebrating Europe's up-and-coming artists with the European Border Breakers Awards

This evening, [ten emerging European artists](#) will receive a [European Border Breakers Award](#) (EBBA) during a ceremony at the Eurosonic Noorderslag festival in Groningen, The Netherlands. Every year since 2004, these awards for popular and contemporary music, co-funded by the [Creative Europe](#) programme, recognise Europe's best up-and-coming artists who have been successful outside their own countries with their first international release. Tibor Navracsics, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, said: *"Music is more than an industry or a creative sector – it is a language which speaks to millions across borders, irrespective of nationality or background. Music can help to tear down barriers and build bridges. That is why we must make the voices of our artists heard in Europe. My warmest congratulations to all this year's winners!"* This year's winners represent a range of musical genres, from folk-influenced rock to electronic pop and dance music. Previous winners of the award include some of Europe's best-known artists: Adele, Stromae and Dua Lipa to name just a few. The EBBA winners – announced in their respective home countries late last year – are selected on the basis of a combination of airplay, sales, live performances in Europe, and position in the European Border Breakers Charts. The Public Choice Award, to be presented tonight by a representative of the European Commission, also gave the public the chance to have its say via an online competition. Tonight's ceremony will once again be hosted by TV personality and musician Jools Holland and will be broadcast via various TV and radio stations across Europe. (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Joseph Waldstein – Tel.: +32 229 56184)

La Commission approuve une nouvelle indication géographique protégée d'Espagne

La Commission européenne a approuvé la demande d'inscription de la [«Carne de Salamanca»](#) dans le registre des indications géographiques protégées (IGP). La «Carne de Salamanca» est une viande bovine issue d'un cheptel de race *morucha* élevé dans la province de Salamanque en Espagne. L'élevage et la production du cheptel bovin apte à la production de «Carne de Salamanca» sont profondément liés à un milieu géographique spécifique, la *dehesa*, qui présente une grande valeur écologique et se caractérise par la présence de chênes verts qui constituent les ressources naturelles les plus importantes pour l'alimentation des vaches, veaux et taureaux. Les éleveurs perpétuent les pratiques traditionnelles d'élevage: le bétail ne rentre jamais à

l'étable et passe sa vie à l'extérieur, dans les pâturages. L'élevage du cheptel bovin et la consommation de sa viande sont intimement liés à cette région où, au XVe siècle déjà, la «Carne de Salamanca» était utilisée comme moyen de paiement des rentes seigneuriales, en raison de sa notoriété et de sa renommée. Cette nouvelle appellation va rejoindre plus de 1420 produits déjà protégés dont la liste est disponible dans la base de données [DOOR](#). Pour plus d'informations, voir aussi les pages sur la [politique de qualité](#). (pour plus d'information: Daniel Rosario – Tel: +32 2 29 56185; Clémence Robin – Tel: +32 229 52 509)

Eurostat: La production dans le secteur de la construction en hausse de 0,5% dans la zone euro – En hausse de 0,6% dans l'UE28

En novembre 2017 par rapport à octobre 2017, la production dans le secteur de la construction, corrigée des variations saisonnières, a augmenté de 0,5% dans la zone euro (ZE19) et de 0,6% dans l'UE28, selon les premières estimations d'Eurostat, l'office statistique de l'Union européenne. En octobre 2017, la production dans le secteur de la construction avait reculé de 0,3% dans la zone euro et de 0,5% dans l'UE28. En novembre 2017 par rapport à novembre 2016, la production dans le secteur de la construction a augmenté de 2,7% dans les deux zones. Un communiqué de presse Eurostat est à votre disposition [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Lucía Caudet – Tel.: +32 229 56182; Maud Noyon – Tel.: +32 229 80379; Victoria von Hammerstein – Tel.: +32 229 55040)

Eurostat: Le taux d'inflation annuel en baisse à 1,4% dans la zone euro celui de l'UE en baisse à 1,7% en décembre 2017

Le taux d'inflation annuel de la zone euro s'est établi à 1,4% en décembre 2017, contre 1,5% en novembre. Un an auparavant, il était de 1,1%. Le taux d'inflation annuel de l'Union européenne s'est établi à 1,7% en décembre 2017, contre 1,8% en novembre. Un an auparavant, il était de 1,2%. Les taux annuels les plus faibles ont été observés à Chypre (-0,4%), en Irlande ainsi qu'en Finlande (0,5% chacun) et au Danemark (0,8%). Les taux annuels les plus élevés ont quant à eux été enregistrés en Lituanie et en Estonie (3,8% chacun) ainsi qu'au Royaume-Uni (3,0%). Par rapport à novembre 2017, l'inflation annuelle a baissé dans vingt-trois États membres, est restée stable dans quatre et a augmenté dans un autre. Un communiqué de presse Eurostat est à votre disposition [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Annika Breidhardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153; Juliana Dahl – Tel.: +32 229 59914)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of European Bridge Travel by CEFC and Rockaway Capital

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of joint control over European Bridge Travel a.s. by CEFC Group (Europe) Company a.s. ("CEFC Europe") and Rockaway Capital SE, all of the

Czech Republic. European Bridge Travel is a holding company which provides tourism-related services via its subsidiaries, in particular the sale of package holidays operated by third parties, the on-line sale of air tickets and the brokerage of travel insurance. CEFC Europe belongs to CEFC China Energy Company Limited, a private company specialising in energy services and financial services. Within the EU, CEFC China Energy Company Limited is active on metals and engineering markets as well as in brewing, real estate rental and football club management, and is currently branching into financial and banking services. Rockaway Capital invests in existing companies and start-ups in the field of internet services, including e-commerce. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns because of its very limited impact on the market structure. The transaction was examined under the simplified merger review procedure. More information is available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the public [case register](#) under the case number [M.8759](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Yizhou Ren – Tel.: +32 229 94889)

STATEMENTS

President Juncker attends European Parliament's Plenary Session in Strasbourg: Programme of activities of the Bulgarian Presidency to the European Parliament and Future of Europe

President **Juncker** attended today's plenary session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg. On the agenda was first the presentation of the [programme of activities of the Bulgarian Presidency](#), and President **Juncker** congratulated the Bulgarian side for a particularly well-prepared Presidency, calling the six months ahead crucial for the European Union and its future. He also welcomed that Prime Minister Borissov had made the building of consensus one of his priorities, a "wise choice", the President said, and more important today than ever. President **Juncker** said: "[...]the truth is that Bulgaria had to come a long way to join our Union. It had to make changes in a handful of years that other countries made in decades. It had to be patient, it had to be determined, it had to be courageous – and it was. Today it is with great pride but also with great expectation that I look forward to the next six Bulgarian month." President Juncker also reminded his audience that he would travel to the Balkans end of February and early March this year. The full speech is [available online](#). In a second session of the EP's plenary today, President **Juncker** participated in a discussion on the Future of Europe with the Prime Minister of Ireland, Leo Varadkar. President **Juncker** said to be delighted about the Leaders' Agenda and said: "17 Summits in the next 18 months on the road to Sibiu – Hermannstadt – to chart our common future. This is even more than we had at the height of the Eurozone crisis. But with one important difference: This time we are not repairing the burning plane while flying, as we had to do it during the crisis. Instead, we are now fixing the roof of our European house while the sun is shining. We now know what we need to do together: completing our Economic and Monetary Union, securing our borders, delivering on our social agenda, making our tax system fairer, reforming our asylum system, getting back to Schengen and completing the

Digital Market and Energy Union.” Please find the full speech [online](#). (For more information: Margaritis Schinas – Tel.: +32 229 60524; Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 229 91382)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos Stylianides visits Austria and Germany to present rescEU, the EU’s plan to strengthen its emergency response

Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos **Stylianides** is travelling to Vienna today to meet with Ms Karoline Edtstadler, State Secretary and Mr Peter Goldgruber, Secretary General of the Austrian Ministry of the Interior, and representatives of the Austrian National and Federal Council. He will then travel to Berlin to discuss with German Minister of the Interior, Mr Thomas de Maizière. During his visit, the Commissioner will also meet with State Ministers of the Interior of the German Länder Hessen and Brandenburg, Mr Peter Beuth and Mr Karl-Heinz Schröter, respectively. The meetings are part of a series of discussions with Member States on the Commission’s new plans to strengthen the EU disaster management through [rescEU](#). The proposal creates a reserve at EU level to be used when national capacities are overwhelmed, without replacing Member State capacities. *(For more information: Carlos Martin Ruiz de Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Daniel Puglisi – Tel.: +32 229 69140)*

Commissioner Crețu to discuss future of EU finances in Slovakia

Tomorrow, Commissioner for Regional Policy Corina **Crețu** will meet the Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico and Deputy Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini, in Bratislava. The discussions will focus on the next EU financial period and the future Cohesion Policy after 2020. Commissioner **Crețu** said ahead of her visit: *“In Slovakia, EU funds account for over half of all public investments, therefore the added value of Cohesion Policy is well known. We are now entering a crucial phase in our discussion on the future of EU finances. As I often say, it’s not only about what budget we want; it’s especially about what Europe we want.”* More information on EU funds in Slovakia is available on the [Open Data Platform](#). *(For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Sophie Dupin de Saint-Cyr – Tel.: +32 229 56169)*

Commissioner Crețu visits Serbia

Tomorrow evening and Friday, Commissioner for Regional policy Corina **Crețu** will be in Belgrade, Serbia. She will meet with Mr Aleksandar Vučić, the President of Serbia, Ms Ana Brnabić, Prime Minister of Serbia and Ms Jadranka Joksimović, Minister of European Integration. *“Serbia is already a very valuable and active partner in cooperation, especially in the context of the Danube and the Adriatic and Ionian macro-regional strategies,”* said Commissioner **Crețu** ahead of her visit, *“We support the European Union path Serbia has chosen.”* *(For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229*

58615; Sophie Dupin de Saint-Cyr – Tel.: +32 229 56169)

Commissioner Andriukaitis presents the European Reference Networks in Berlin

Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, Vytenis **Andriukaitis**, is on official visit to Berlin on 18-20 January. On Wednesday he will visit Charité Hospital where he will meet Mr Lutz Stroppe, State Secretary in the Federal Ministry of Health, and will hold a Question and Answers session on [European Reference Networks](#) (ERNs) which are virtual networks involving healthcare providers across Europe. *"I will be delighted to visit Charité Hospital in Berlin and to learn more about the activities and progress in Germany in the work of the European Reference Networks. This has been an important initiative I launched in March 2017 and I am very attentive to the course it takes. The European Reference Networks are an innovative example of structured and voluntary collaboration in the field of healthcare among all EU Member States and Norway, bringing a real added value to the patients across the EU"* said Commissioner **Andriukaitis** before the visit. (For more information: Anca Paduraru – Tel.: +32 229 91269; Aikaterini Apostola – Tel.: +32 229 87624)

[Upcoming events](#) of the European Commission (ex-Top News)

Speech by President Juncker at the Plenary session of the European Parliament on the debate with the Prime Minister of Ireland, Leo Varadkar, on the Future of Europe

Mister President,

Taoiseach,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To be very short: I could not agree more.

But I have to deliver a speech because the disappointment would be too big, if I did not do so.

I am delighted that my good friend Leo comes before this House today and I would like to thank President Tajani and the Parliament for holding this timely debate on the future of our Union. This is the first of the kind and the first of many I hope.

Since he became Prime Minister, Leo has proven to be a committed European. I knew it before, but he has proven it, now being where he is.

It is fitting that today we remember – with sadness – another true Irish and European statesman.

I would like to pay my personal tribute to Peter Sutherland. He was the first ever Commissioner to receive the Gold Medal from this House.

I was deeply saddened to hear of his passing. Peter Sutherland was a proud Irishman, another giant of European politics and a friend to so many. He will be missed but his legacy lives on.

As Peter in the past shaped our policies of today, so can we shape the policies of the future with the choices we make today. It was less than a year ago that I presented to you the White Paper on the future of Europe – five possible scenarios for our project. Since then the debate has picked up in all corners of Europe.

The White Paper set a new approach: debate, not dictate. And the White Paper and the different scenarios are still inspiring the debate across Europe. However, the future of Europe cannot remain a scenario. The time to take decisions is now. Because citizens will head to the polls in May 2019. And in doing so, they should have a clear understanding of how the European Union will develop over the years to come.

Last September, I therefore presented to you my very own vision for a more united, stronger and more democratic Union: a Union where solidarity and responsibility go hand in hand in all policy areas – from migration to the banking and monetary Union; from energy to our common budget. A Union where the rule of law is not optional but the very basis of everything we do – from implementing decisions jointly taken to preparing enlargements. A Union of equals where the euro and Schengen – the most visible expressions of European integration – continue to unite our continent.

Since the publication of the White Paper, a lot has happened: the Commission has organised hundreds of Citizens' Dialogues – important – six of them in Ireland. And I am happy to see that the Taoiseach himself has launched Citizens' Dialogues on the future of Europe across Ireland – from Galway to Dublin.

This is how it should be. To succeed in Europe, we have to put an end to this eternal artificial opposition between the Union and its Member States. Our Union can only be built with our Member States, never against them. And that is why your invitation of national leaders to this House, President Tajani, is so important.

I am delighted to see the commitment from the European Council. It has agreed the Leaders' Agenda: 17 Summits in the next 18 months on the road to Sibiu – Hermannstadt – to chart our common future. This is even more than we had at the height of the Eurozone crisis. But with one important difference: This time we are not repairing the burning plane while flying, as we had to do it

during the crisis. Instead, we are now fixing the roof of our European house while the sun is shining.

We now know what we need to do together: completing our Economic and Monetary Union, securing our borders, delivering on our social agenda, making our tax system fairer, reforming our asylum system, getting back to Schengen and completing the Digital Market and Energy Union.

In all these talks on Europe's future I have been privileged to have a close working relationship with the Taoiseach, and there is no better example than the way we worked during the first phase of negotiations with the United Kingdom.

When it comes to the issue of Ireland in these negotiations, Europe is united. It is all for one and one for all.

The Commission and the Irish government worked tirelessly, side-by-side to help us reach the sufficient progress needed to move onto the next phase of the talks.

This partnership will continue and this partnership will grow stronger as we work on the future of our Union at 27.

I read with pleasure Leo's speech at a Citizens' Dialogue last November when he set out his vision for a *"Europe that continues to do well what it does well; that focuses on the big things and that – where appropriate – devolves some powers back to Member States, municipalities and regions"*. For me, this is more than just a beautiful poem – these are the essential questions, we all need to answer when going into the negotiations for the next EU budget.

This debate on the budget will be an open and honest discussion. And one that goes right to the heart of the debate on the future of the European Union: if we want the European Union to be no more than a single market, then a single, small budget will be sufficient. But if we want a European border and coast guard to protect our external borders or European civil protection teams to help in case of floods or fires, then the answer is simple: Member States must put their money where their mouths are.

Sehr verehrter Herr Präsident,

genau weil diese Zukunftsfragen jetzt in Angriff genommen werden müssen, haben wir vorgeschlagen, unter der Leitung des Ersten Vizepräsidenten Timmermans eine Taskforce über Subsidiarität und Proportionalität einzurichten. Im nächsten Wahlkampf wird es genauso sein wie im letzten Wahlkampf – wenige haben nur den Mut in Bürgerversammlungen, auf öffentlichen Plätzen, in Bierzelten oder sonst wo aufzustehen, wenn es heißt die Europäische Union und die Europäische Politik in Gänze zu verteidigen. Man wird immer wieder den Bürgern sagen: Europa macht zu viel und Europa muss weniger tun. Es gibt Bereiche, wo Europa mehr tun muss – ich habe sie oft hier erwähnt – es gibt aber auch Bereiche, wo wir uns zurücknehmen sollen, wo weniger mehr wäre und wo weniger Tatendrang mehr Fortschritt brächte als blindes Losstürmen, Zielen entgegen, die uns eigentlich von unserem

Instrumentarium her unerreichbar scheinen.

Deshalb wäre es mein Wunsch, dass das Europäische Parlament sich an dieser Taskforce beteiligen würde. Mir wird berichtet – but this is a House full of rumours –, dass das Europäische Parlament an dieser Taskforce nicht teilnehmen würde und wolle. Das ist ein grober Fehler, weil wir brauchen das Europäische Parlament, wenn wir darüber reden welche Kompetenzen der Europäischen Union in die Mitgliedstaaten zurückverlagert werden können. Und dies wird eine Debatte sein, wo man natürlich dann auch darüber reden muss, was wir besser machen können, indem wir mehr tun – auch über neue Kompetenzen muss geredet werden. Aber die Hauptaufgabe ist Ordnung zu bringen in das Zuständigkeitsgerangel zwischen Europäischer Union und den Mitgliedstaaten. Und ich bitte deshalb herzlich, vor allem die großen Fraktionsführer dieser Welt, diesen Beschluss – falls es ihn denn gibt – zu überprüfen. Weil es ist nicht im Interesse des Europäischen Parlaments, dass Kommission und Vertreter der Mitgliedstaaten sich alleine – ohne das Mittun des Europäischen Parlamentes – mit diesen Fragen beschäftigen.

Mister President,

Since 1999, the Good Friday Agreement has preserved peace and enabled progress where there once was bloodshed and discord. We all know that peace can be fragile. And I see no more important use of our new budget than guaranteeing and financing the peace process in Ireland. This is an unconditional European commitment. This is what the Commission will deliver with our proposal for the next Multiannual Financial Framework in May. Our new budget must be as ambitious as the goals we set ourselves and as flexible as possible to adapt to new and unforeseen challenges. Our future cannot wait.

Together with Leo, with the Irish, and with others, we will swim in that direction.

Thank you.

Education and training initiatives

1. Draft Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning

What is the main aim of this Recommendation?

The objective of the proposed Recommendation is to improve the development of key competences (e.g. literacy, languages, or civic and digital skills) in education systems, for people of all ages throughout their lives and to provide guidance to Member States on how to achieve this objective. This is important to better prepare people for changing labour markets and active citizenship in more diverse, mobile, digital and global societies. To this

end, the Recommendation puts a specific emphasis on the development of entrepreneurial attitudes and innovation-oriented mindsets.

The proposal is also part of the answer to improve educational systems across Europe to better manage various challenges highlighted by the latest [PISA survey](#), which pointed to the poor EU average performance in basic skills.

How will the Recommendation support Member States in implementing competence-oriented education, training and learning?

The new Recommendation responds to the main challenges encountered so far in introducing competence-oriented education, training and learning: insufficient support of educational staff, limited development of methods and tools to assess and validate competences, and the need to introduce new ways of learning to enhance competence development.

The annex to the Recommendation outlines good practices which can promote competence-oriented approaches in education and training and non-formal learning. They address the challenges mentioned above and indicate possible ways of overcoming them.

How will the European Commission support the implementation of the Recommendation?

The European Commission will support the implementation of the Recommendation and the use of the annexed European Reference Framework of Key Competences by helping Member States learn from each other. It will also develop reference materials and tools in cooperation with Member States, such as massive open on-line courses (MOOCs), assessment tools, networks including [eTwinning](#), the world's biggest teachers' network, and the Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe ([EPALE](#)). Finally, it will also monitor the acquisition of competences in the Member States.

What are the changes in relation to the previous 2006 framework of key competences?

Updates of the eight key competences include:

- A stronger focus on basic skills (literacy, languages and basic digital skills) as well as on horizontal competences such as creativity, problem solving, critical thinking and communication. These competences help people be resilient, adapt to more volatile labour markets and to fast changing societies.
- A specific focus on promoting entrepreneurial education and experiences at all levels of education. The Commission recommends to Member States to provide at least one entrepreneurial experience during compulsory education. It also encourages platforms bringing together schools and businesses, appropriate training to teachers and principals, and the creation of mini companies in schools.
- Focusing on improving the acquisition of science, technology, engineering and mathematical (STEM) competence and making careers in these areas more attractive.

- An updated definition of digital skills that includes coding, cybersecurity and digital citizenship aspects.
- Strengthening citizenship, democratic values and human rights in the civic competence and highlighting intercultural skills in the cultural awareness and expression competence.

2. Digital Education Action Plan

How can the EU help individuals and education institutions and systems adapt to the digital transformation?

The Digital Education Action Plan sets out a series of initiatives to support people and organisations in dealing with rapid digital change. The Action Plan focuses on the development of digital skills (skills, knowledge and attitudes) for work and participation in society more widely, the effective use of technology in education and the use of data and foresight to improve education systems. Measures will include supporting schools with high-speed broadband connections, scaling up SELFIE, a new self-assessment tool developed by the Commission to help schools better use technology for teaching and learning and a public awareness campaign on online safety, cyber hygiene and media literacy.

How will the European Commission support the implementation of the Plan?

The Action Plan outlines a series of initiatives that the Commission, in partnership with Member States and stakeholders, will implement by the end of 2020. The Plan will be implemented in the context of the [Education and Training 2020](#) (ET2020) process, the EU's framework for Member State cooperation on education and training. The Commission will work closely with stakeholders including the ET 2020 Working Group on Digital Skills and Competences.

What are the main priorities of the Plan?

The Action Plan has three key objectives:

- making better use of digital technologies for teaching and learning;
- developing the digital skills needed for living and working in an age of rapid digital change;
- improving education through better data analysis and foresight.

What can be done to attract girls to Information and communications technology (ICT) and STEM subjects?

Studies show that interest in STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) studies and careers by female students often wanes by the age of 15. Girls would like to see more female role models in STEM and have more practical hands-on experience in STEM subjects. In the Action Plan, the Commission commits to working with industry, NGOs and education systems to ensure that female students have the digital skills and the positive role models and mentors they need to help ensure equal participation in STEM studies and careers.

The Commission will encourage more coding classes for girls to take place in the context of the [EU Code Week](#) initiative. It will also work with the [Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition](#) and other organisations across Europe to promote activities to encourage girls and women to develop digital skills. The Commission will work with companies and civil society to break down stereotypes and makes sure that girls are better informed about job opportunities in the ICT sector. The Commission will also build on successful initiatives promoted by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT), for example workshops targeting secondary school students.

How will the European Commission support the update of high-speed broadband in schools?

There is a clear digital divide between EU countries: some countries have already connected schools to high-speed broadband, whereas others are lagging behind. One reason for the lack of connectivity is that a number of schools and local authorities are not aware of the available options of broadband services as well as of the possible sources of support and financing. The European Commission will work to change this, for example through the recently created [EU network of Broadband Competence Offices](#).

In addition, the Commission will look into supporting high-speed connectivity in schools i.e. notably through a voucher scheme focusing on disadvantaged areas.

Why is the Commission proposing a framework for digitally certified qualifications?

Digital technologies offer new ways of boosting the trustworthiness and transparency of qualifications and protecting against document forgery. Digital qualifications are more portable than 'paper-based' certificates and can be hosted in more than one server or institution. They can include extensive metadata, be more easily displayed in CVs, social media and personal webpages and can be viewed by interested parties.

Building a European Education Area means ensuring that qualifications even from small providers are recognised and can be trusted, particularly in a cross-border context. A framework for digitally-signed qualifications will allow for more coherence and provide support for quality assurance; it will improve transferability and comparability and support mobility, cooperation and exchange.

How will the European Commission promote coding?

The Commission's goal is to involve at least half of schools in EU Code Week by 2020. EU Code Week is a dynamic grass-roots movement that aims to bring coding and digital literacy in a fun and engaging way to all Europeans by letting participants explore programming as well as hardware, 3D-printing, robots, etc.

By reaching out through schools, it can include all young people – girls and boys equally. Furthermore, allowing teachers to explore programming in

different subjects together with their students strengthens their competences in using coding as a tool for teaching digital skills.

To further promote coding, the Commission will work with the EU Code Week ambassadors, Member States, the eTwinning network, the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition, the Digital Champions and other interested bodies and organisations.

What are the risks students face when using technologies and what can the EU do to protect and empower them?

In an increasingly connected world, risks include vulnerability of personal data, cybersecurity threats and fraud, fake news, cyber-bullying and violent radicalisation. All aspects of online safety and cyber hygiene must be addressed, and individuals need to understand, for example, how to manage their online presence, keep their accounts, information and devices safe.

Strengthening children's and young people's critical thinking and media literacy is crucial. Digital technologies will continue to integrate further into our physical and mental lives and all generations need to become confident digital citizens, empowered by the opportunities offered by digital technology, and at the same time aware of and resilient to risks related to digitisation.

The EU will promote education and awareness-raising activities aimed at empowering all EU citizens to become active, responsible, safe and critical users of technologies. One such action will be the launch of an EU-wide campaign on cyber hygiene, media and social media literacy, and effective ways to tackle online risks such as cyberbullying, fake news, or disturbing content. The campaign will encompass all relevant stakeholders and reach children, young people, parents, and educators. Moreover, the action will support educators across Europe in understanding and teaching cyber security through the creation and delivery of online and face-to-face courses for teachers.

3. Recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching

What is the aim of this Recommendation?

Today, EU Member States face serious challenges to maintaining open, fair and cohesive societies in view of rising populism, xenophobia, divisive nationalism, discrimination, the spreading of fake news and misinformation, as well as the challenge of radicalisation.

All these phenomena put the foundations of our societies at risk. They undermine social cohesion, hinder the emergence of a common sense of belonging and weaken citizens' confidence in public institutions and in our democratic systems. Moreover, many people are not aware of how the European Union functions and what its objectives are. Many also know little about other Member States and their diversity.

Education has a vital role in helping to reverse these trends, by promoting

our shared values, fostering inclusion and enabling people to better understand the European Union and each other.

Why is the EU giving guidance on values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching?

This Recommendation seeks a stronger commitment from Member States in a field that entirely falls within their remit.

EU action is particularly relevant when it comes to funding specific projects (see below). In particular, by funding mobility among schools and virtual exchanges through e-Twinning, the EU can help schools, teachers and pupils to exchange and build friendships with peers in other countries, so that they can experience first-hand what it is to be European.

EU guidance can also help policy-makers and practitioners to identify best practices, learn from their peers in other countries and be inspired by practices elsewhere that address similar issues they face at home.

What will the European Commission put in place to support Member States in these efforts?

The Commission will be looking for adequate funding to [Erasmus+](#) in the post-2020 EU funding period, to ensure that more people – students, apprentices, trainees, but especially more teachers and school pupils – can avail of cross-border mobility through Erasmus+. Already in 2018, the Commission will dedicate up to EUR 180 million to school exchanges.

The Commission will work to include 1 million teachers and schools in the e-Twinning network in the next 10 years to support their activities. This will allow even more pupils and teachers to communicate, collaborate and develop projects through this learning community.

The Commission will continue to frame funding instruments including Erasmus+, [Creative Europe](#) and [Europe for Citizens](#) in such a way as to prioritise projects that support the promotion of common values, inclusive education and an enhanced understanding of the EU and its Member States. [The European Structural and Investment Funds](#) also help to promote inclusive education, by supporting projects targeting education systems, teachers and schoolchildren. They finance initiatives to ensure young people complete their education and get the skills that make them more competitive on the jobs market. Reducing school drop-out rates is a major priority, along with improving vocational and tertiary education opportunities. In the 2014-2020 period more than EUR 39 billion are allocated to achieving that objective.

For more information

[Press release “Education package”](#)