G7 Leaders' Statement on Venezuela

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We, the G7 Leaders of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and the European Union, are united in rejecting the electoral process leading to the May 20, 2018, Presidential election in Venezuela.

By failing to meet accepted international standards and not securing the basic guarantees for an inclusive, fair and democratic process, this election and its outcome lack legitimacy and credibility. We therefore denounce the Venezuelan Presidential election, and its result, as it is not representative of the democratic will of the citizens of Venezuela. The Venezuelan government has missed the opportunity for an urgently needed political rectification.

While the regime of Nicolas Maduro solidifies its authoritarian grip, the people of Venezuela continue to suffer human rights abuses and serious deprivation, causing increasing displacement which is affecting countries throughout the region.

We stand in solidarity with the people of Venezuela and call on the Maduro regime to restore constitutional democracy in Venezuela, schedule free and fair elections that can truly reflect the democratic will of the people, immediately release all political prisoners, restore the authority of the National Assembly and provide for full, safe and unhindered access by humanitarian actors.

We remain committed to supporting a peaceful, negotiated, democratic solution to the crisis in Venezuela and to support the Venezuelan population through humanitarian assistance.

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New rules on data protection for EU

institutions agreed

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On 23 May 2018, representatives of the Council and the Parliament agreed on a new regulation on the handling of personal data by EU institutions and other EU bodies. The new rules are aligned with the general data protection regulation (GDPR) which enters into force on 25 May 2018.

The new provisions will apply to data processing by Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies. They will increase the protection of personal data and ensure a free flow of that data between the institutions and the different bodies, insofar as it is necessary.

> The new rules on data protection for EU institutions further update the Union's data protection regime. It is an important signal for citizens: tighter rules on data protection are for everybody, including the EU institutions themselves. I am pleased that we could agree on these a couple of days before the general data protection regulation enters into force on 25 May.
>
> *Tsetska Tsacheva, Bulgarian minister of Justice*

As in the GDPR, the new regulation provides for a number of principles to be followed in the processing of data and a number of rights guaranteed to individuals whose data are collected. These include, for example, the right of individuals to access, correct or delete their personal data. In line with the GDPR, institutions and other bodies must also ensure that they provide transparent and easily accessible information on how personal data is used, and foresee clear mechanisms for individuals to exercise their rights.

The new legal instrument also reconfirms, clarifies and enhances the role of data protection officers within each EU institution and of the European data protection supervisor. The objective is also to try to simplify the procedures in this field.

In line with the agreement reached by the co-legislators today, processing of personal data by the Union agencies in the field of law enforcement and judicial cooperation (e.g. Eurojust) is covered by the regulation through a specific chapter. The rules in this chapter are aligned with the Law Enforcement Directive. More specific rules can also be laid down in the founding acts of these agencies to take into account their particular circumstances. Europol and the European Public Prosecutor's Office are, for the time being, excluded from this regulation. A review will be conducted by the Commission in 2022.

Next steps

After confirmation of the political agreement reached today by representatives of the Council and the Parliament, the text will undergo linguistic revision and subsequently be formally adopted by the two institutions. The new rules will then apply as of Autumn 2018.

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Remarks by Commissioner Moscovici at the European Semester Spring Package press conference

Bonjour,

Si je devais à mon tour résumer en deux phrases ce paquet, je dirais qu'il représente la sortie de la crise et la normalisation économique.

Mais aussi, un rappel à tous que les efforts doivent continuer si nous voulons consolider et renforcer les avancées de ces dernières années.

Le symbole principal de la normalisation, c'est la proposition de mettre un terme à la procédure de déficit excessif à l'encontre de la France. Nous le faisons parce que la trajectoire de réduction des déficits est forte et claire – la correction est nette pour 2017 (avec un déficit à 2.6%) et durable sur 2018 et 2019.

C'est un moment important pour la France, la fin de 9 longues années de procédure qui est pénible, et d'efforts budgétaires qui ne sont jamais faciles à imposer et à supporter mais qui sont nécessaires. Je ne vous le cache pas, c'est aussi un moment symbolique pour l'ancien ministre des finances français que j'ai été, pour le commissaire que je suis aujourd'hui de voir ainsi se clôturer aujourd'hui ce chapitre du déficit excessif français. Et donc je veux marquer là une satisfaction toute particulière.

C'est aussi une bonne nouvelle s'agissant de la deuxième économie de l'Union et de la zone euro. Après la décision qui améliorait la position de la France dans la procédure de déséquilibres macro-économiques, j'y vois la confirmation d'un rééquilibrage du socle au sein de la zone euro qui est la condition pour la stabilité de notre monnaie commune.

Le second signe de normalisation est la situation de l'Espagne, pour laquelle nous adoptons aujourd'hui un avis budgétaire *« broadly compliant »* pour 2018, ce qui vient confirmer que l'Espagne passera nettement sous 3% de déficit cette année, comme tous les autres pays de la zone euro. C'est la première fois, je le rappelle, que les 19 pays de la zone euro sont sous 3% depuis que cette monnaie unique existe. C'est une autre page de la crise qui se tourne. Et nous devrions voir la fin du chapitre des procédures pour déficit excessif si les choses se confirment comme nous le souhaitons,

Le rapport de convergence que nous adoptons aujourd'hui – en parallèle de la Banque Centrale Européenne – sur les pays non membres de la zone euro illustre le fait qu'après dix années de crise, notre union monétaire peut à nouveau regarder sereinement la perspective d'élargissements à venir.

Cependant nous sommes conscients qu'il faut tirer les enseignements de la crise – et nous garder de toute précipitation car actuellement aucun des pays concernés ne remplit les critères prévus par les traités. Continuons donc ensemble le travail de préparation, dans un bon état d'esprit avec une perspective qui est ouverte.

Enfin, le contexte apaisé sur le front de la croissance nous permet de concentrer notre attention sur des questions structurelles importantes pour la cohésion de notre union. Il y a bien sûr les questions sociales, Marianne en parlera, simplement cette Commission est tout entière derrière elle pour marquer l'importance des questions sociales.

C'est le cas de la lutte contre les pratiques de planification fiscale agressive.

Sept Etat-membres font l'objet de considérants spécifiques, dans le sillage des analyses que j'ai présentées ici des rapports pays en février. Les changements nécessaires dans ces pays pour lutter contre ces pratiques relèvent de réformes profondes, et expliquent la place de ces questions dans nos recommandations. C'est une première ! Ca n'avait jamais été fait auparavant et c'est une nouvelle illustration de notre volonté de lutter contre non seulement la fraude et l'évasion fiscales mais aussi les pratiques de planification fiscale agressive, d'optimisation fiscale.

Notre approche dans ce domaine comme pour d'autres, est faite d'encouragement et de dialogue, j'en veux pour preuve le fait que ces Etats membres, les sept, nous ont présenté des mesures nouvelles pour répondre aux problèmes identifiés, certaines plus convaincantes que d'autres. Il ne s'agit pas de pointer du doigt tel ou tel pays, tel ou tel gouvernement, mais bien de souligner les efforts accomplis et d'identifier les défis encore à relever.

Mais la reprise qui s'est désormais muée en croissance robuste, nous sommes dans une phase d'expansion et non plus de reprise, ne doit pas nous conduire à baisser la garde: après tout, pour certains Etats membres, nous devons nous en souvenir, la crise de 2009 a trouvé ses origines dans des erreurs de la politique économique menée lors des années de boom.

L'enjeu principal est donc le bon calibrage des politiques budgétaires dans et en dehors de la zone euro.

Keeping in mind that prevention is always better than cure, the Commission has today adopted decisions concerning two Member States whose expansionary fiscal policies – at a time of already very strong economic growth – are for us a source of concern.

We address a warning today to both Hungary and Romania on the existence of a significant deviation from the adjustment path toward the medium-term budgetary objective in 2017.

For Hungary, we propose that the Council recommend that the country take measures in 2018 to correct this significant deviation.

And for Romania, which is already subject to a significant deviation procedure, we recommend that the Council issue a decision on non-effective action and a renewed recommendation to take measures in 2018 and 2019, again to correct the significant deviation.

We have also adopted reports today on Belgium and Italy, under Article 126.3 of the Treaty, which experts of the Pact know well – these reports review compliance with the debt criterion of the Treaty, examining all relevant factor and we have done that in all years since we are in office as a Commission.

In the case of Italy, our analysis suggests that the debt criterion should be considered as currently complied with, notably as Italy was found broadly compliant with the preventive arm of the Pact in 2017.

For Belgium, as there is no sufficiently robust evidence to conclude that Belgium did not comply with the preventive arm requirements, the report could not fully conclude as to whether the debt criterion is complied with. So we will need to continue to observe the situation closely but we had a very positive dialogue with the Belgium government and I hope that this will go on.

For both countries, we will reassess compliance with the preventive arm of the Pact on the basis of the ex-post data for 2018, to be notified in Spring 2019.

Lastly, we have today made public our review of the application of flexibility within the rules of the Pact introduced by this Commission in January 2015, immediately after its entry in function, a little over three years ago and subsequently agreed by the Council. The review shows that our key objectives have been met, as we now have a predictable and transparent framework in place, allowing the Commission to apply the existing rules of the Pact in a country-specific and balanced manner.

The flexibility allowed under the Pact has allowed us to strike a good balance between the objective of ensuring prudent fiscal policy and the proof of it is that the EDP is almost over, while stabilising the economy and supporting growth and we are in this phase of expansion so I think the guidance with flexibility was right, that is always better to dialogue and convince than to punish and constraint. Our spring forecast shows that public debt and deficits have declined, while economic activity has picked up since 2016.

Et maintenant je passe la parole a Marianne pour vous expliquer les aspects sociaux du paquet.

Speakings by Commissioner Thyssen on the 2018 Country-Specific Recommendations under the European Semester

Ladies and gentlemen,

With the economy growing at its fastest pace in a decade, we now have an opportunity to look ahead. And focus on building a basis for sustainable, inclusive and long-term growth. Since November last year, the European Pillar of Social Rights is guiding us on this path.

Our recommendations address the 3 dimensions of the Pillar:

- Equal opportunities in education and training and access to the labour market
- Fair working conditions
- Social protection and inclusion for all

Allow me to highlight some of the main issues we have identified in this year’s exercise:

o The **rapid** pace of **technological progress** calls now more than ever for reforms to **up-skill and re-skill** European workers. Young people are entering an increasingly dynamic and flexible labour market while older people have to work longer. This means we need to invest in people throughout their careers so that everyone can choose their own desired career path.

o We also need to address **the quality of education and training**. Skills mismatches are still too high across Europe. And too many people face unequal access to quality education due to their socio-economic status or migrant background. Also other vulnerable groups face too many obstacles. Improving the access and **quality of education and training** is essential for integrating people and reducing inequalities. This concerns a majority of Member States and in particular Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania concerning the integration of disadvantaged groups. Austria, Belgium and France for example could benefit from improving the employment prospects of people with a migrant background.

o The **opportunity** to participate in the economy and society should also be given **equally to men and women**. Starting a family should not be a burden on your professional life. Care services and family benefits are therefore essential for **combining family life with career aspirations**, in particular also for women, helping in turn to get more women into work, especially in Italy, Poland and Slovakia. Now is the time to fix the roof, but we must also break the glass ceiling. And that starts by giving equal opportunities to men and women.

o The social situation is improving in most Member States: In total, there are 5.6 million people less at risk of poverty or social exclusion than in 2012. Yet, high **income inequality** and **in-work poverty** persists. In particular the **low impact of social transfers** on reducing poverty requires more attention in a number of Member States. It is not just a question of spending. Efforts should be focused on results, that is, the **inclusiveness and effectiveness of social protection**. This concerns especially the Baltic countries, Croatia but also Spain.

o Our rapidly ageing population in Europe also impacts public finances. There is a need to reform our pension, healthcare and long-term care systems. This is not only key to sustain public finances but also to making sure that people have adequate pensions and access to quality services. Member States have taken steps in this direction but more efforts are still needed to tackle this challenge.

o All of this will not be possible unless we improve **ownership** of the reforms. **Engagement** in society with all stakeholders is key to make reforms work. This includes working together with social partners and civil society. Effective **social dialogue** which ensures that the voice of those affected is heard, is the best recipe. How this is done is up to Member States but we continue to support the greater involvement of national social partners in policy-making, especially in Hungary and Romania, who both received a CSR on this.

To conclude, our recommendations adopted today are essential to build a more prosperous future with equal opportunities for all.

Higher skills and better welfare will make the current growth sustainable and inclusive. This is what we want to achieve and why we call on Member States also to translate these social recommendations into action.

Let me close by saying that also the EU budget has a vital role to play in delivering on our objective to “invest in people”.

This will be at the core of our proposal next week on the post 2020 vision for the European Social Fund.

As a matter of fact, our funds will be more closely aligned with the European

Semester.

I can tell you already now that the detailed analysis of Member States' challenges in the context of the European Semester will serve as a basis for the programming of the funds of the next period.

Thank you.

Remarks by Vice-President Dombrovskis at the European Semester Spring Package press conference

Good afternoon everyone,

Welcome to our press conference on our Spring Economic Package.

It includes country specific recommendations for 27 Member States, so all Member States except Greece, and a number of decisions under the Stability and Growth Pact.

The College has also adopted a Communication on the review of the "flexibility" within the SGP and, last but not least, the biannual Convergence Report.

Europe's economy is growing at its fastest pace in a decade. The growth is set to continue at a robust but slightly slower pace this year and next. Employment is at a record high, investment recovering, public finances improving. However, the risks related to trade protectionism and volatility in global financial markets are looming.

Our main message is: we need to use the current good times to make our economies more resilient. We should strengthen fundamentals for sustainable and inclusive growth. This means structural reforms to tackle weaknesses in our economic and financial systems. It means building fiscal buffers, which would give countries more manoeuvring space in the next downturn and it means investment to lift up our potential.

As regards country specific recommendations many countries still need to improve their business environment and act to open up their product and services markets. Such reforms, if implemented, have a strong potential to attract fresh investment and create more jobs. There is a need for stronger support for innovation. We recommend more efforts to improve education and skills training, including life-long learning. And for some countries, we recommend to strengthen the public administration and good governance, while intensifying the fight against corruption.

A number of countries are asked to improve the sustainability of their health-care and pension systems. This week, we will publish the 2018 Ageing Report. This report states that the fiscal impact of population ageing is set to be a significant challenge in almost all Member States.

Last but not least, the EU proclaimed last year the European Pillar of Social Rights, and we are building on this guidance to keep a special focus on social challenges. Marianne will elaborate on this.

For some countries we also propose to take decisions under the SGP. Pierre will give you details in a minute, so let me report very telegraphically.

Let me congratulate France, as today we recommend abrogating the country from the Excessive Deficit Procedure. Now, it will be important to build on these good results.

This leaves only one Member State Spain under the corrective arm of the Pact under Stability and Growth Pact, down from 24 countries in 2011.

We also adopted our Opinion on the Draft Budgetary Plan for Spain, which was found to be broadly compliant with the Stability and Growth Pact.

We also have two clear-cut cases for significant deviation procedures – this is what we recommend for Romania and Hungary.

Both countries currently are in the preventive arm of SGP and experience a very robust growth, well above the EU average. Yet they lead expansionary policies.

We also adopted reports under Article 126.3 for Italy and Belgium and do not propose to open a debt-based Excessive Deficit Procedures for these countries at this stage.

And finally, on the Convergence Report. The euro was created as the single currency for the whole EU. Therefore euro accession is open for any EU country working towards it.

Joining the euro area is a transparent and rules-based process. The convergence criteria were put in place to ensure countries are ready to adopt the single currency. Our convergence report also looks at the compatibility of national legislation with the EU law. Today's report concludes that at the moment, none of the seven countries examined fulfils all conditions for adopting the euro.However, three of these countries – Bulgaria, Croatia and Sweden – meet all nominal convergence criteria except for the exchange rate stability. And we welcome the current work by the Bulgarian authorities towards the Exchange Rate Mechanism II participation, so to meet also the exchange rate stability criteria.

As I said earlier, we also look at the compatibility of national legislation.Our finding today is thatCroatiais currently the only country where legislation is fully compatible with the compliance duty under the Treaty.

President Juncker has made it very clear: the EU wants to support countries in their efforts to get ready for the euro.

Next week, the Commission will also table a proposal for a new Reform Support Programme in the context of the next Multiannual Financial Perspective.

This will include a dedicated ‘convergence facility’ for technical and financial assistance to support the Member States in the implementation of reforms on their way towards joining the euro.

Thank you very much,

I now pass the floor to Pierre.