

Press conference remarks by Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission at the Informal Leaders' Meeting/Western Balkans Summit in Sofia

Thank you, Donald.

Once again, I would like to join the large camp of those who are congratulating the Bulgarian Presidency for its numerous efforts and for the excellent organisation of the meeting we had yesterday and today.

As we are running out of time, I have to be very brief because we have to take our planes in order to continue our work in Brussels.

Sur l'Iran d'abord: tant que les Iraniens respecteront leurs engagements, l'Union européenne évidemment s'en tiendra à cet accord, dont elle, l'Union européenne, fut un des co-architectes. Mais nous devons savoir que les sanctions américaines annoncées ne resteront pas sans effet. Et donc nous avons pour devoir, Commission et Union européenne, de protéger nos entreprises européennes et notamment les petites et moyennes entreprises.

Hier soir, j'ai été encouragé par le débat qui fut le nôtre puisque les propositions que la Commission a soumises à la méditation des membres du Conseil européen furent intégralement suivies par les chefs d'Etat ou de gouvernement.

Nous devons maintenant agir. C'est la raison pour laquelle nous lançons le processus de recours à la loi de blocage, Blocking Statute, de 1996 qui vise à neutraliser les effets extraterritoriaux des sanctions américaines dans l'Union européenne. Nous devons le faire et le ferons demain.

Ensuite nous avons décidé de permettre à la Banque européenne d'investissement de faciliter l'investissement des entreprises européennes en Iran. La Commission maintiendra sa coopération avec l'Iran. Le Commissaire de l'énergie, Monsieur Cañete, se rendra dans les 48 heures à venir en Iran pour poursuivre nos échanges avec les autorités iraniennes.

On trade – that means on the trade situation between the U.S. and the European Union – I have to be very clear once again, and I am repeating myself by saying it: we want an unlimited exemption from the proposed tariff measures.

If Europe obtains an unlimited exemption from the proposed tariff measures, we are ready to engage in talks with our transatlantic partner, meaning that we want to deepen our cooperation, focusing on four specific points:

Firstly, deepening our energy cooperation, notably on liquified natural gas.

Secondly, focusing on voluntary cooperation between regulators on both sides on an ad hoc basis, outside the framework of trade negotiations.

Thirdly, working together with the US on the World Trade Organisation reform to ensure a level playing field for all and to lift the current blockage of the WTO's Appellate Body nominations.

And lastly, discussing with the US how to best improve reciprocal market access, notably for industrial products including, amongst others, cars as well as the liberalisation of government procurement.

These talks will be based on the principles of reciprocity and WTO compatibility and with the objective of avoiding a trade war. But let me repeat: we will not negotiate with the sword of Damocles hanging over our heads. It is a matter of dignity and it is a matter of efficiency.

Thanks.

[EU-Western Balkans summit: improving connectivity and security in the region](#)

President of the European Commission **Jean-Claude Juncker** said: *"This summit has allowed us to forge even closer links with our friends from the Western Balkans who, step by step, each day come a little bit closer to the European Union – each at its own pace and merits. Being anchored in the European Union means sharing values and principles, including respect for the rule of law, independence of the judiciary and freedom of expression – because the European Union is first of all a community of values and law."*

The [summit](#) and the resulting [Sofia Declaration](#) stress the importance of the Western Balkans' continued commitment to the rule of law, the fight against corruption and organised crime, good governance, as well as respect for human rights and rights of persons belonging to minorities. The effective implementation of reforms in these areas is key for the region's further progress along the European path. EU and Western Balkan leaders agreed to take a number of actions to improve energy and [transport infrastructure](#), as well as [digital connectivity](#) in the region. The EU and Western Balkans partners also laid the ground for an ever closer cooperation in the areas of security, migration and in tackling geopolitical challenges.

Connecting infrastructures, economies and people

To support the implementation of the Sofia Declaration and drawing on the Commission's [Western Balkans Strategy](#) and its six [flagship initiatives](#), President Juncker announced today ([hyperlink to remarks](#)) a new package of measures which will boost connectivity within the region and with the EU, notably through **the Western Balkans Investment Framework**.

- The EU will provide grants for additional 11 high-priority **transport** projects (road, rail, ports) worth **€190 million**. This investment can leverage up to **€1 billion** in loans from international financing institutions. This includes funding for the first two sections of the 'Peace Highway' (Nis-Pristina-Durres) and the 'Blue Highway' along the Adriatic coast.
- In order to develop the new **Digital Agenda** for the Western Balkans, the EU has earmarked **€30 million** for investments in broadband rollouts across the region. Partners agreed to extend the region's arrangements to reduce roaming costs to all six partners, while at the same time the EU will develop a roadmap to lower the cost of roaming between the Western Balkans and the EU.
- Moreover, the EU will support the region's energy transition through promoting **renewable energy** sources, including a sustainable use of **hydropower**.
- In the area of economic connectivity, the Commission continues to support the region's own plan to develop a **Regional Economic Area**, and the Summit welcomed commitments to step up work on recognition of qualifications, as well as on trade facilitation within the Western Balkans.
- The Commission will increase its support for **youth and education**, in particular by **doubling the funding for Erasmus+** for the region and by launching a pilot project for mobility in **vocational education and training**. The Commission will also establish a "Western Balkans Youth Lab" in 2018, providing space for innovative policy-making addressing the needs of young people. Finally, it will support the expansion of the **Regional Youth Cooperation Office** and introduce an intra-regional mobility scheme.

Further elements of the EU's annual Connectivity Package will be presented later on during the year.

In addition, partners committed to the [Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans](#). It will support the move of the Western Balkans towards a digital economy, and includes steps such as a roadmap to lower the cost of roaming as well as a technical assistance package for potential investments in areas such as broadband.

Closer cooperation on security

The EU and the Western Balkans face shared security challenges. At the Summit, the EU and the Western Balkans agreed to step up common work on **key security priorities**:

- countering terrorism including its financing, violent extremism and the return of foreign fighters as well as preventing radicalisation;

- enhanced cooperation in the fight against serious and organised crime, in particular on illicit firearms and drugs trafficking, smuggling of goods and persons, as well as cyber and hybrid threats.

The EU and the Western Balkan partners agreed to build on already substantial on-going efforts by enhancing strategic and operational work in the field of **police and judicial cooperation**, in particular through the participation of the Western Balkans in the EU Policy Cycle 2018-2021, the coordinated EU-wide cooperation against serious and organised crime. With support from the Commission, EU Justice and Home Affairs agencies, such as Europol or CEPOL, will further engage in the Western Balkans for effectively linking internal and external actions against all forms of cross-border crime.

Cooperation in responding to the refugee crisis has demonstrated the value of coordinated efforts. EU and Western Balkan leaders agreed to strengthen cooperation on **migration** and **border management**, including through the liaison officers deployed by the EU.

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[If we wish to meet our growing demands for live-in care, we must recognise the rights of care workers](#)



The EESC conference in Rome pointed to many shortcomings in Italy's live-in care sector, which is on the rise in the country shown to be the second "oldest" in the world according to recent figures

Despite the high demand for live-in care services, Italy's live-in care sector is still plagued by many irregularities, such as inadequate recognition of social and labour rights of carers, undeclared work and insufficient public spending on care. This was revealed by a meeting held on 16 May by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) at the CNEL in

Rome.

Speakers at the meeting in Rome – the third of five EESC country visits that are part of its ongoing consultation procedure on the future of this rapidly growing sector in Europe – said that more than half of the care workers in Italy were not legally employed. Some 75 percent of live-in care work in the country is done by migrant women, many of them coming to Italy from Eastern Europe.

The EESC's "going-local" meetings are a follow-up to its [own-initiative opinion](#) on the rights of live-in care workers, adopted in September 2016 as the **first policy document at European Union level dealing with the sector of live-in care work in Europe**, which has long remained almost invisible to EU and Member State policy-makers.

Their aim is to shine a spotlight on the precarious situation of these workers in Europe's labour markets, but also on many uncertainties faced by care recipients who often recruit carers through informal networks or the internet.

The meetings are organised by the EESC Member and rapporteur of the opinion, **Adam Rogalewski**, who advocates the regularisation and professionalisation of the live-in care sector and the inclusion of live-in care workers in the long-term care system, with all the rights arising from relevant EU and Member State employment regulations.

The Rome meeting follows the one held in Berlin this March and the one held in London last November. Two more are planned for Poland and Sweden, representing some of the countries of origin and destination of live-in care workers.

The situation in Italy is often described as a telling example, with a growing number of domestic workers in the rapidly ageing Italian society and a welfare system which is unable to meet the increased demand for care, forcing families to almost exclusively bear the burden of care costs.

At the same time, Italy's care workers – both foreign and Italian – share the fate of their European counterparts who work in difficult conditions, often with an unregulated employment status.

"Live-in care work entails a series of difficulties for carers. Most of them are migrant women and it is very difficult for them to reconcile work and private life. They live in solitude, far away from their loved ones, facing language barriers and having difficulties integrating into society", **Dr Luciana Mastrocola** from CGIL, Italy's largest trade union federation, told the conference.

She also pointed to the fact that neither foreign nor Italian carers in Italy enjoyed full protection of social rights, unlike most workers in other sectors, and that social recognition of their work was missing, despite the fact that it has today become indispensable, compensating for the shortcomings of the Italian care and welfare systems.

“The Italian government did not start implementing sustainable policies early enough. If we wish to keep meeting our demands for care, we must recognise the rights of these workers”, **Dr Mastrocola** said.

Many live-in carers in Italy have no documents, and, while families want to “legalise” these workers, the authorities are not willing to do so, said **Sara Gomez**, a live-in care worker and a member of CGIL. She stressed that people working in the sector were very isolated but, thanks to the efforts made by CGIL, a considerable number of them had now become unionised.

Italy introduced its first law on paid domestic work in 1958, its first special collective agreement in 1974 and ratified the ILO’s Convention 189 in 2013. The same year saw the signing of the collective agreement on domestic work between Italian trade unions and employer associations.

In her keynote speech at the meeting, **Professor Sabrina Marchetti** from the Ca’ Foscari University of Venice highlighted the strong need for inclusive measures for non-EU migrants and called for the “Italian collective agreement to be adapted to the requirements of the ILO Convention 189, particularly in regard to the maternity rights and sick leave of all care workers.”

She maintained that the Italian situation was different to other countries and affirmed that neither employment through agencies nor self-employment status were a suitable strategy for delivering live-in care.

Dimo Barlaan from the disability advocacy organisation “FISH onlus” called for the current situation of a 54 hour work week to be addressed through collective agreements for live-in care workers by creating part-time working arrangements.

Andrea Zini, vice president of the home care employers’ association Assindatcolf and of the European Federation of Domestic Workers (EFFE) put the number of legally employed care workers in Italy at 900 000, whereas as many as 1 250 000 million were in irregular employment.

According to Italy’s National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), Italy is the second “oldest” country in the world, which means the demand for assistance and care can only grow, **Mr Zini** said.

“For this reason we are convinced that family, work and housing can be crucial factors for the revival of both the Italian and the European economy. But for this to happen, the government must become aware of this, because now the burden, including the economic burden, is entirely borne by employer families. If we could fully deduct the cost of domestic work, we would create a “virtuous” circle: more jobs and less irregular work, more professionalism and better well-being for families”, he said.

Mr Zini called for the professionalisation of domestic care work and for the creation of a European database for the sector, for the implementation of training and certification systems, and for the coordination of supply and demand at the European level.

The EESC Member **Pietro Vittorio Barbieri** stressed that it was impossible to

achieve the transition from undeclared to declared work without addressing the issue of insufficient public spending in the sector. “Families are under strain. It is about time the government did more regarding demographic change which is a threat to Italy”, he said.

Another EESC Member, **Pietro Francesco De Lotto**, insisted on the role of national and local bilateral collective bargaining and on the need to increase tax deductions to families hiring live-in care workers. “We also need to invest more in training to upskill the existing workforce,” he added.

Concluding the meeting, **Mr Rogalewski** urged all stakeholders to implement Principle 18 of the European Pillar of Social Rights on long-term care before it is too late. According to Principle 18, “everyone has the right to affordable long-term care services of good quality”.

BACKGROUND:

The EESC opinion adopted in 2016 presented eight recommendations for Member States and 12 recommendations for EU legislators to improve the overall capacity of the sector to create quality jobs and deliver quality care. They include implementing processes for recognising qualifications and experience acquired by live-in care workers, improving the way they are posted and incorporating their rights into the European semester. A rigorous application of the Victims’ Rights Directive in cases where workers are victims of exploitation, and the improvement of safeguards in the Employers’ Sanctions Directive to protect labour rights of undocumented workers should also be high on the agenda. It is also necessary to collect adequate data on live-in care workers and carry out research into their working and living conditions.

The findings of the EESC country visits will be presented in a report which will be published later in 2018.

<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/news-media/press-releases/europe-needs-proactive-policy-long-term-care-sector>

<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/news-media/press-releases/live-carers-face-precious-conditions-despite-shortage-care-workers-eu-labour-market>

<https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/news-media/press-releases/eesc-shines-spotlight-vital-role-live-carers>

Remarks by President Donald Tusk after the EU-Western Balkans summit

Press contacts

Preben Aamann

European Council President Spokesperson

+32 2 281 51 50

+32 476 85 05 43

Good afternoon. Before anything else, let me thank Prime Minister Borissov and his whole team; you did something excellent and I am really impressed when it comes to your effectiveness, determination, and mainly because of your engagement we can say today that the summit was successful, and of course thank you for the wonderful Bulgarian hospitality. *Blagodaria Boyko, blagodaria prelestna Bulgaria* (thank you Boyko, thank you beautiful Bulgaria)

We have just concluded a very good and fruitful EU-Western Balkans summit. I believe that it took us too long since our last meeting in Thessaloniki fifteen years ago, and this is why we decided to meet again in two years in Croatia. This is the best illustration that the integration with the Western Balkans is a top priority for the EU.

Today we reaffirmed our mutual commitment to the European perspective for the whole region. As I said during my recent visit to the region, the European Union is and will remain the most reliable partner of the entire Western Balkans.

And in very concrete terms we discussed how to improve connections with and within the Western Balkans region. We are speaking about human, economic, digital and infrastructure connections. The package of measures we signed a while ago – the so-called “Sofia Priority Agenda” – adds new initiatives to our current cooperation. For example, we agreed to double the Erasmus+ to allow more youth to study in the EU. We agreed to work towards the lowering of roaming charges and we agreed to create more favourable conditions for private investments by providing better bank guarantees.

And to avoid any confusion, let me be very clear: The connectivity agenda is neither an alternative nor a substitute for enlargement. It is a way to use the time between today and tomorrow more effectively than before, so that our citizens and businesses are not waiting for all the benefits of EU integration. Because I don't see any other future for the Western Balkans than the EU. There is no other alternative, there is no plan B. The Western Balkans are an integral part of Europe and they belong to our community.

Before concluding let me very briefly comment on EU leaders' meeting yesterday evening.

We agreed that the EU will step up its efforts on digital and innovation in order to rise to the challenge of technological revolution. You should expect very concrete decisions when we formally meet in June. They will include elements like the establishment of a European Innovation Council in the next MFF, pilot projects including for Artificial Intelligence and more funds for investments. All this will be based on our European values, including full respect of citizens' privacy, also online.

As to the Iran Nuclear Deal we agreed unanimously that the EU will stay in the agreement as long as Iran remains fully committed to it. Additionally the Commission was given a green light to be ready to act whenever European interest are affected.

inally on EU-US trade. Also here, we have achieved a united approach that will strengthen the Commission in its ongoing negotiations with the United States. The EU is even ready to talk about trade liberalisation with our American friends but only if the US decides an unlimited exemption from steel and aluminium tariffs. President Juncker will present our approach in more detail. Thank you.

[Visit the meeting page](#) [Download as pdf](#)

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