

# Invitation letter by President Donald Tusk to the members of the European Council ahead of their meetings on 22 and 23 March 2018

## Press contacts

### Preben Aamann

European Council President Spokesperson

+32 2 281 51 50

+32 476 85 05 43

At the upcoming spring European Council we will focus on trade and the planned US tariffs, the economic situation in the EU, digital taxation as well as Turkey and Russia. Additionally, we will discuss Brexit at 27 and the euro area reforms in the Euro Summit formation of 19 Leaders.

First we will discuss trade. On this issue, we stand by the European Commission, which is currently holding talks with our American friends on how to exempt the EU from the planned steel and aluminium tariffs. We must prepare for all possible scenarios. As the world's biggest trading power, the EU's response will be responsible and reasonable. Free and fair trade has created millions of jobs in Europe, and elsewhere, contributing to peace and stability all around the world. As Montesquieu put it, 'the natural effect of trade is to further peace'. Therefore, we will always want more trade, not less. Hence our recent trade deals with Canada, Japan, Singapore and Vietnam, the ongoing talks with Mercosur and Mexico, and planned trade discussions with Australia and New Zealand.

When the US raised tariffs in 1930, which applied to 1/3 of our trade, it led to a global trade war. The tariffs currently proposed, if implemented, would affect around 1,5% of transatlantic trade. I bring these numbers up not to diminish the need for a suitable, WTO-compatible response – indeed, such a response would be inevitable given the number of potentially affected jobs in Europe. But I do this to demonstrate the broader perspective. Transatlantic relations are a cornerstone of the security and prosperity of both the United States and the European Union. Given the importance of this relationship, we should continue to engage with the US in order to strengthen the transatlantic economic relationship, not weaken it. Despite seasonal turbulences.

When it comes to Brexit, we will discuss how to approach the rest of the negotiations with the UK, including on our future relationship. I want us to have a broad debate on our negotiating strategy. In this context I will ask you to adopt a first set of guidelines on the future relationship with the

UK. Additionally, yesterday our negotiators reached a solution on parts of the withdrawal agreement. Whether all 27 Member States can welcome this at the European Council remains open. I still need a couple more hours to consult with some of the most concerned Member States. To me, one thing is clear. We have achieved success when it comes to citizens' rights and the financial settlement. As I have stated from the very beginning of these negotiations, defending the rights of our citizens will be the number one priority for the EU. And we have made it. European citizens will be fully protected from the consequences of Brexit. This also means that our citizens crossing the Channel in this period will not get worse treatment than those who did so before. This is good news for all Europeans. As regards the most contentious issue, namely Ireland, Prime Minister May has reassured me that she accepts all options agreed in December to be on the negotiating table. Including the option of full regulatory alignment between Ireland and Northern Ireland if there is no other possibility to avoid a hard border. This bodes well for the rest of the negotiations.

Last but not least, on Russia. Following the Salisbury attack we should not only express our full solidarity with the UK but also draw operational conclusions, as this incident poses a challenge to our shared security. I therefore propose we strengthen our resilience to Chemical Biological Radiological and Nuclear-related risks, including through closer cooperation among the EU institutions, our States and NATO. We should also continue to bolster our capabilities to address hybrid threats, including in the areas of cyber, strategic communication and counter-intelligence.

As for the meeting agenda: after our traditional exchange of views with European Parliament President Tajani at 15.00 on Thursday, Prime Minister Borissov will give us an overview of progress in implementing our previous conclusions, including ongoing work on the reform of the Common European Asylum System. Then we will have a full discussion on trade and adopt relevant conclusions. We will also adopt the decision appointing the Vice-President of the ECB. Following that, European Central Bank President Draghi will join us for an exchange on the current economic situation in the EU and we will adopt conclusions in this domain. Finally, before we break for our press conferences, I will invite Eurogroup President Centeno to inform us on the ongoing work in the Eurogroup on the Banking Union.

Over dinner I hope to have an open and frank political debate on taxation, on the basis of the enclosed Leaders' note and without written conclusions at this stage. Following from the discussion we had at our informal meeting in February, we will also review recent developments with Turkey, with a view to the high-level meeting scheduled to take place in Varna on 26 March. At the end of our dinner we will adopt conclusions following the Salisbury attack.

On Friday, we will reconvene at 27 to review progress on negotiations with the UK and adopt guidelines on the framework for our future relationship. Finally, the Leaders of the euro area Member States will have an open debate on the long-term development of our Economic and Monetary Union, based on the other Leaders' note. Our meeting should end before lunch.

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

---

# Multilateral investment court: Council gives mandate to the Commission to open negotiations

## Press contacts

### Maria Tomasik

Press officer

+32 2 281 24 63

+32 470 88 23 83

On 20 March, the Council adopted the negotiating directives authorising the Commission to negotiate, on behalf of the EU, a **convention establishing a multilateral court for the settlement of investment disputes**. The Council also decided to make the negotiating directives public.

The overall objective for creating a multilateral investment court (MIC) is to set up a **permanent body to settle investment disputes**. This multilateral investment court would adjudicate disputes under future and existing investment treaties. For the EU, **the MIC would eventually replace the bilateral investment court systems** included in EU trade and investment agreements.

The initiative is part of the **EU's new approach to investment dispute resolution**, moving away from the traditional arbitration framework towards a **court system**. It aims at responding to some of the legitimate public concerns raised in the context of the traditional investor-to-state dispute settlement, by bringing key features of domestic and international courts to investment arbitration.

On the basis of the mandate provided by the Council, the Commission will start negotiations with its trading and investment partners in the framework of the **United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL)**.

While the exact features of the MIC (such as the composition of the court, its budget, the possibility of getting support from a secretariat, etc.) will depend on the outcome of the upcoming negotiations between the countries that will sign up to the new system, the **EU will favour a system based on the following principles:**

- the court should be a permanent international institution;
- the judges should be tenured, qualified and receive permanent remuneration. Their impartiality and independence should be guaranteed;
- proceedings before the court should be conducted in a transparent

manner;

- the court should give the possibility of appeal against a decision;
- effective enforcement of the decisions of the court would be vital;
- the court should rule on disputes arising under future and existing investment treaties that countries decide to assign to the authority of the court.

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

---

## **Press Release: EU Public Private Partnerships suffer from widespread shortcomings and limited benefits, say Auditors**

[Download PDF](#)

---

## **Pressemitteilung: Öffentlich-private Partnerschaften in der EU werden von weitverbreiteten Defiziten beeinträchtigt und bieten nur begrenzte Vorteile, so das Fazit der EU-Prüfer**

[Download PDF](#)

---

## **WiFi4EU: registration opens for EU financing of free wireless internet**

# hotspots in public spaces

## **Who will benefit from the WiFi4EU programme?**

EU citizens and visitors who will be able to access free Wi-Fi in public spaces such as parks, squares, public building, libraries, health centres in the EU will benefit from the WiFi4EU project. The Wi-Fi hot spots will be installed by an installation company for which the municipality will pay using the WiFi4EU voucher.

## **Who can apply for a voucher?**

The municipalities (or equivalent local administration) and associations formed by municipalities can apply for the WiFi4EU voucher. The list of entities eligible to apply was agreed with each Member State and will be made available for reference for municipalities or associations to check whether they are eligible to register/apply. 'Associations formed by municipalities' can register multiple municipalities but will be required to separately submit the final application online for each municipality included in their registration. Each voucher is awarded to an individual municipality as the beneficiary.

## **How to apply for WiFi4EU?**

Applications and registrations are done via the dedicated online portal [www.WiFi4EU.eu](http://www.WiFi4EU.eu). First, the municipalities need to register (starting 20 March) and only later, when the call will be launched, they can apply.

## **When to apply for a voucher?**

On the 15th May the first one of the five calls will be opened. Once the call will be opened, only the registered municipalities will be able to submit their application for a voucher in the [www.WiFi4EU.eu portal](http://www.WiFi4EU.eu). The submission can be done by clicking on the apply button. Four other calls will be launched later – all before the end of 2020.

## **What information is needed to register ahead of the call?**

The municipalities are able to register directly on the portal by providing basic information about their municipality. They will need to provide the contact details of a legal representative. Any municipality can apply in their chosen language without needing any intermediary.

Municipalities will NOT be requested to include a technical project or documentation about the Wi-Fi network to be deployed. They will also NOT need a preliminary assessment of costs from a Wi-Fi installation company, to be able to apply for a voucher.

## **Can one municipality apply several times?**

Each municipality can only benefit from one voucher during the entire

duration of the initiative. Therefore, municipalities selected for a voucher in one call cannot apply for any subsequent calls. However, municipalities that applied and did not get a voucher can try again.

### **How will municipalities be selected for a voucher?**

The municipalities need to be quick, the winners will be selected on a first-come, first-serve basis based on the date and time of the submission of their application (NOT the one of their registration).

### **Is there a limit of vouchers per country?**

For the first call, the number of vouchers per country should not exceed 8% of the call's budget. Each country will receive a minimum of 15 vouchers if they submit at least 15 applications.

### **How much money does one voucher represent?**

Each voucher is worth €15.000.

### **What the municipalities can do with the WiFi4EU voucher?**

The voucher must be used to pay for the installation of Wi-Fi hotspots in the public spaces, such as train stations, parks, libraries, or any other public spaces. The municipality must ensure that the installation is completed and Wi-Fi hot spot starts working within 18 months after being awarded the voucher. Therefore within this time the municipality can define its project and select a Wi-Fi installation company which can complete the installation.

### **Where to install the Wi-Fi hotspot?**

The municipalities decide themselves on the 'centres of public life' where the WiFi4EU hotspots will be installed. The Wi-Fi hotspots must be installed in the areas where no similar offers of free Wi-Fi connectivity already exist.

### **Are there any specific conditions for the projects?**

Each municipality which gets a voucher will have to contract the Wi-Fi installation company of their choice to install the Wi-Fi hotspots equipment (in accordance with public procurement rules). The Commission will not intervene in the contracting relations of the municipality with the Wi-Fi installation company. Wi-Fi installation company can register on the portal at any time but need to do so at the latest when a municipality has contracted them as an installation company.

Municipalities will also be free to choose their internet provider, which could be the same as the Wi-Fi installation company or not. The high-speed broadband connectivity subscription should deliver a high-quality internet to users and must be subscribed by the municipality for at least 3 years.

### **What is the minimum internet speed for WiFi4EU?**

The Wi-Fi network should provide a high quality internet. The internet speed must be at least 30Mbps. The Commission will remotely monitor the quality of the connectivity.

### **How can the voucher be redeemed?**

To ensure the voucher can be redeemed correctly, the Wi-Fi installation company will need to register on the WiFi4EU portal and provide their details (contact person, contact details, geographical scope of operations and bank account details).

Both the Wi-Fi installation company and the municipality will need to confirm that the local network is installed and operational. Upon verification that the local network is indeed operational (remote monitoring) the payment will be triggered.

The Wi-Fi installation company will then be able to redeem the voucher from the European Commission and any outstanding balance not covered by or above the value of the voucher will be settled by the municipality.

### **Can the project be broader than what is funded by the voucher?**

Municipalities may use the WiFi4EU voucher to partially fund a project of higher value; therefore any equipment and installation costs beyond the value of the voucher would fall under the contract between the Wi-Fi installation company and the municipality.

### **What is the budget of WiFi4EU?**

The total budget of WiFi4EU initiative is €120 million.

### **How many vouchers will be awarded per call?**

The first call will award 1 000 vouchers. The later four calls will have a higher number of vouchers available.

### **For More Information**

[Press release](#)

WiFi4EU factsheet