

Letter of congratulations from President Donald Tusk to Miloš Zeman on his re-election as President of the Czech Republic

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Vice-President Šefčovič at the launch of the EU Energy Poverty Observatory

Speech by Vice-President **Šefčovič**, in charge of Energy Union, at the launch of the EU Energy Poverty Observatory, in Brussels.

Thank you Dominik for your introduction.

President Buzek,

MEP Griffin,

Deputy Minister Stankov,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today is an important day. The launch of the Energy poverty Observatory marks an important milestone in our struggle for a more just, solidary, and inclusive Europe.

I often say that society is not measured only by its most successful; be them researchers or entrepreneurs. Yes, we do want Europe to be at the forefront of innovation, especially in the field of energy. But a society is also measured by its ability to care for its weakest and most vulnerable. And that is why all throughout our efforts to grow the economy, transform our technologies, and smarten our systems – we must constantly stop, look back and see if anyone was left behind.

Let us be honest. In 2018, energy poverty is a visible problem across the EU. It has reached an unacceptable level – not only in the poorer countries of the EU but also in the richer ones. This is a critical issue because it does not stand alone; it creates social exclusion, health concerns, and hinders the further integration of our countries. It is therefore a problem we cannot afford to ignore.

Let me also stress that I don't look at energy poverty only through the prism of numbers in studies and reports. Given that this topic is very close to my heart, I have visited cities which are afflicted by this problem in order to see it with my own eyes.

One of the ways in which we will aggregate the definitions and best practices is the Energy Poverty Observatory which we are launching today. The Observatory will develop indicators measuring energy poverty across the EU. This will provide, for the first time, a comprehensive overview of the situation based on comparable data.

We live at a time when 'alternative facts' or 'fake news' are popular. But we must make sure our policy making is based on sound and well researched facts and data.

These data will therefore be useful for national and regional governments, for cities, for civil society and even for entrepreneurs pitching their solutions.

But it is very important for me that the observatory will not only provide data and information. It must engage with Member States, national, regional and local stakeholders. It must contribute its expertise and assistance to encourage them to fight energy poverty.

Our current legislation already requires Member States to act on energy poverty once it is identified. The problem is that two out of three Member States do not define or measure energy poverty. This means that energy poor households are not identified nor catered for. But looking the other way won't make this problem disappear.

Our new proposals (of the revised Electricity Directive and the Energy Union Governance Regulation) therefore take the requirement a step further. For example, it requires Member States to clearly define and measure energy poverty; to monitor its levels and report on measures taken to prevent it every two years.

Of course we recognise that the context in which energy poverty occurs varies

greatly among our Member States. That is why we do not attempt to create a universal definition of energy poverty. We rather opted for a description of the term. This will allow us to continue working together, addressing energy poverty across borders and learn from each other's experience – based on a common understanding that we all share.

At the same time, Member States will be the ones to define the criteria for measurement, and cost-effective solutions. We leave flexibility and leeway for each country to fine-tune it.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our responsibility as EU legislators must not stop at the level of definitions. Nor should we be throwing the ball back to the Member States' court. That is why we proposed EU legislation for directly tackling energy poverty.

For example, as part of the general consumer protection policy, we propose procedural safeguards against disconnections. With the new proposal, consumers will be informed on alternatives to disconnection. They will receive this critical information well ahead of the planned disconnection. This seems obvious and we have excellent examples in many Member States how this can work. But it is not obvious everywhere. Therefore, I would like all Member States to have such safeguards. Some Member States have shown that it can be done; so others should be able to do it as well.

These are all ex-post solutions for those who are already in dire difficulty to pay the bills. Equally important in treating the problem is preventing it altogether. Energy efficiency is the best answer to energy poverty.

This notion is the backbone of a wide range of concrete measures we put in place. We are committed to the 'energy efficiency first' principle as part of our climate and energy targets. We even proposed to increase this target to a binding level of 30%. But energy efficiency is not only about decarbonisation, air quality, innovation, or jobs. It is also a remedy to help those whose houses are not ready for winter, whose roof is leaking, and windows let in the cold. By improving their physical living conditions we can also help reduce their bills.

That is precisely why we propose to require Member States to target energy-poor households and social housing in their energy efficiency measures (revised Energy Efficiency Directive). The same applies to the long term building renovation strategies (revised Energy Performance of Buildings Directive).

Finally, we need to promote investment. The Smart Finance for Smart Buildings Initiative of the Clean Energy for All package has identified several measures to unblock the necessary investment into building renovations. Smart financing solutions do exist but in sufficient number and they do not always reach those in need.

That is why we are working with the European Investment Bank, the EBRD,

national promotional banks and with local retail banks on new solutions. It is still not enough but we have some concrete examples from the UK, Ireland, France or Poland where billions of Euros have been invested in building renovations, especially in vulnerable communities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The legislative measures and financial solutions are not hypothetical; they touch the lives of real people. What we have proposed to the Parliament and the Council could lift between half a million and 3 million households out of poverty! We are well into our negotiations with the Council and the Parliament on this precise topic. As expected, there are some intense discussions in the Council and not every Member State seems convinced yet that energy poverty is a topic for EU policies. But I am optimistic that we will have constructive discussions which will in the end reflect the importance of the issue.

I know that many in the Parliament share this view and want EU policies to address energy poverty. I'm sure President Buzek and MEP Griffin will tell us more about the political climate on this topic in the Parliament.

I'd like to conclude by saying that if there was ever a good time to make your voices heard about addressing energy poverty – it is now. This is when we are negotiating and finalising our legislation and try to build momentum for more investment into energy efficiency. This is when your input can be highly useful.

I would therefore like to thank you all organisations sitting here for your engagement and input. Please continue helping us keeping energy poverty high on the agenda until all the relevant legislation is adopted.

Thank you very much.

Letter of congratulations from President Donald Tusk to Sauli Niinistö on his re-election as President of the Republic of Finland

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[Brexit: Council \(Article 50\) adopts negotiating directives on the transition period](#)

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The Council gives a mandate to the Commission to discuss Brexit transition period

The Council, meeting in EU27 format, adopted supplementing negotiating directives for the Brexit negotiations, which detail the EU27 position regarding a **transition period**. These negotiating directives provide the Commission, as the EU negotiator, with a mandate to start discussions with the United Kingdom on this matter.

EU ministers have given a clear mandate to the Commission on what is the type of transition period that we envisage: full EU acquis to be applied in the UK and no participation in the EU institutions and decision-making. The 27 adopted the text speedily today and we hope an agreement on this with the UK can also be closed swiftly.

Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister Ekaterina Zaharieva

Duration of the transition period

The guidelines of the European Council (Article 50) of 15 December 2017 stated that transitional arrangements must be **clearly defined and precisely limited in time**. The proposed end date for the transition period in the negotiating directives is **31 December 2020**.

Application of EU acquis

According to the EU position, during the transition period **the whole of the EU acquis** will continue to apply to the UK as if it were a member state. **Changes to the acquis** adopted by EU institutions, bodies, offices and agencies during that period would also apply in the UK.

All existing EU regulatory, budgetary, supervisory, judiciary and enforcement instruments and structures will also apply, including the competence of the Court of Justice of the European Union.

Concerning the area of freedom, security and justice, where the UK has a right to **opt in and opt out** of individual pieces of legislation, the current rules will apply for acts adopted during the transition by which the UK is bound before its withdrawal. However the UK will no longer be allowed to opt into new measures in this area other than those amending, replacing or building upon the ones he is bound before its withdrawal.

Trade policy and international deals

During the transition period, the UK will **remain bound by the obligations** stemming from the agreements concluded by the EU, while it will no longer participate in any bodies set up by those agreements.

As the UK will **continue to participate in the customs union and the single market (with all four freedoms) during the transition**, it will have to continue to comply with EU trade policy, to apply EU customs tariff and collect EU customs duties and to ensure all EU checks are being performed on the border. This also implies that during that period the UK **will not become bound by international agreements** in its own capacity in fields of competence of EU law, unless authorised to do so by the EU.

EU institutions and bodies

The UK, as already a third country, will **no longer participate in the institutions and the decision-making** of the EU.

The UK will no longer attend meetings of Commission experts groups, committees or other similar entities where member states are represented. **Exceptionally** on a case-by-case basis, the UK could however be invited to attend one of these meetings **without voting rights**.

Specific **consultations** will be foreseen with regard to the **fixing of fishing opportunities** (total allowable catches) during the transition period, in full

respect of the EU acquis.

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

Daily News 29 / 01 / 2018

Le Président Juncker et le Collège des Commissaires participent au lancement de l'année européenne du patrimoine culturel 2018 en Belgique

Ce mercredi 31 janvier 2018, le Président de la Commission européenne, Jean-Claude **Juncker**, et les membres du Collège des Commissaires participeront au lancement, en Belgique, de l'Année européenne du patrimoine culturel, à l'invitation de Philippe Close, Bourgmestre de la Ville de Bruxelles, et avec la participation de toutes autorités belges compétentes. L'Année européenne du patrimoine culturel 2018 mettra en lumière la richesse et la diversité de notre héritage culturel, en valorisant son rôle dans le développement d'une identité commune et dans la construction de l'avenir de l'Europe. Cette journée de lancement sera marquée par un spectacle en 3 dimensions intitulé [« Mille Reflets d'Europe »](#) sur la Grand-Place de Bruxelles auquel assisteront le Président **Juncker**, Tibor **Navracsics**, Commissaire chargé de l'éducation, de la culture, de la jeunesse et du sport, et les autres commissaires. Cette visite inédite du Président et du Collège des Commissaires témoigne des très bonnes relations qu'entretient la Commission avec la Ville de Bruxelles, et de l'attachement et de la reconnaissance qu'elle souhaite exprimer envers la capitale *de facto* de l'Union et ses habitants qui l'accueillent depuis plus de 60 ans. A cette occasion, le Président **Juncker** a déclaré: « *L'Année européenne du patrimoine culturel doit célébrer en 2018 notre diversité culturelle. L'Europe est réputée dans le monde entier pour la richesse et la diversité de ses expressions culturelles et créatives, notamment ses sites naturels et archéologiques, ses musées, ses monuments, ses villes historiques, ses œuvres d'art, musicales et audiovisuelles, ainsi que ses traditions et coutumes. Cette année de festivités sera une occasion formidable d'encourager les citoyens, en particulier les jeunes, à explorer la richesse de la diversité culturelle européenne et réfléchir à comment la préserver pour les futures générations.* » Les journalistes qui souhaitent participer [à l'événement](#) peuvent s'enregistrer [ici](#). Un communiqué de presse complet est disponible [ici](#), ainsi que le communiqué de presse de la Représentation de la Commission en Belgique [ici](#) et plus d'informations [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations, *Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Joseph Waldstein – Tel.: +32 229 56184*)

Commission awards almost EUR 330 million in research grants to post-doctoral researchers and to innovative training programmes

What will the next generation of solar cells look like? What is the most

effective way for cities to manage floods? These are just two of the challenges that will be tackled by the new [Marie Skłodowska-Curie Individual Fellows](#) which have been announced by the European Commission today. Following the 2017 bid for post-doctoral research funding from the [Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions](#), the Commission is awarding grants worth EUR 248.7 million in total to 1,348 researchers with the highest potential to make a game-changing impact on our society and economy. Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Tibor **Navracsics**, said: *"We are today recognising the potential of 1,348 excellent, internationally mobile researchers who faced intense international competition to be awarded a fellowship. The projects they will work on will tackle some of the biggest challenges our societies face, helping to build a resilient, fair, competitive Europe. In addition, the EU is now investing in truly innovative research training programmes for doctoral candidates and experienced researchers, enabling them to make full use of their talents and empowering the organisations supporting them to gain competitiveness on a global scale."* The funding awarded to the researchers, which is part of the EU's [Horizon 2020](#) programme for research and innovation, represents an increase of €30 million compared to the previous call. Under another strand, the [Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Co-funding of regional, national and international programmes](#) the Commission announced that 8 doctoral and 13 post-doctoral research training programmes of outstanding quality – from nine EU Member States and three associated countries – will receive cofunding from the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions of €80 million over five years. You can find more details on the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions [Individual Fellowships](#) and the [Co-funding of regional, national and international programme](#) as well as a factsheet on [Marie-Skłodowska-Curie Actions](#) online. (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Joseph Waldstein – Tel.: +32 229 56184)

State aid: Commission concludes that the introduction of the Road Act Amendment in the Czech Republic does not involve State aid

The European Commission has found that the prohibition of outdoor advertising such as billboards alongside motorways and main roads, which was introduced by the Czech Republic through the "Road Act Amendment" and entered into force on 1 September 2017, does not involve State aid. In October 2017, the Commission received a complaint from an advertising company alleging that, by introducing amendments to the Act No. 13/1997 Coll. on Roads, the Czech authorities would have granted alleged State aid to its competitors. The Commission assessed the complaint and found in particular that the prohibition: (i) does not grant a selective advantage to any company, since it is a general ban imposed to enhance road safety; (ii) applies equally to all companies operating in the market for outdoor advertising; (iii) does not involve a transfer of State resources in any way to any company. Therefore, the Commission concluded that the measure does not involve State aid within the meaning of Article 107(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). More information will be available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the [State Aid Register](#) under the case number SA.48856. (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Sarantopoulou – Tel.: +32 229 13740)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Commissioners Oettinger, Navracsics and Thyssen to host a meeting on the European Solidarity Corps with key stakeholders

Tomorrow, 30 January, Commissioner for Budget and Human Resources, Günther H. **Oettinger**, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Tibor **Navracsics**, and Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne **Thyssen**, will host a meeting in Brussels on the [European Solidarity Corps](#). This event will be an opportunity to bring together key partners of the Solidarity Corps, including representatives of the European Parliament and the Presidency of the Council of the EU, to have an open discussion on the lessons learnt during its first year. They will also discuss important issues regarding the [next phase of the European Solidarity Corps](#). Over a working lunch with meeting participants, the Commissioners will discuss remaining issues in the ongoing negotiation process on the legislative proposal on the European Solidarity Corps and give an outlook on key areas. A [stakeholder forum took also place on 12 April 2017](#). Since its [launch on 7 December 2016](#) around 48,000 young people have registered in the European Solidarity Corps portal. Around 2,600 young people have benefitted or are benefitting from placements in more than 1,750 organisations. More information on the European Solidarity Corps can be found [here](#). (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Sara Soumilion – Tel.: +32 229 67094)

Commissioner Hahn in Belarus to follow up the Eastern Partnership Summit

Johannes **Hahn**, Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations will visit [Belarus](#) on 30 January to follow up the [Eastern Partnership Summit](#) which took place on 24 November in Brussels. Commissioner **Hahn** will meet with the President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko, the Prime Minister of Belarus Andrei Kobyakov and with Vladimir Makei, Minister of Foreign Affairs, to discuss the priorities of the Eastern Partnership Summit and the deepening of EU-Belarus relations. This will also be reflected in the new EU-Belarus Partnership Priorities which will define further cooperation for the coming years. The Commissioner will also meet with representatives of the opposition and participants of the [MOST project](#). Ahead of the mission, Commissioner **Hahn** said: *“Since my last visit in Minsk in 2015, relations between the EU and Belarus developed positively and we extended our cooperation considerably. Cooperation in areas of common interest has been stepped up. The EU increased its support to regional and private sector development; support to civil society; and energy efficiency. The EU’s efforts will continue to focus on increasing engagement with all sectors of Belarus society. My visit will focus on EU-Belarus relations, human rights as well as regional cooperation and our joint progress on the [“20 deliverables for 2020”](#), which aim to bring tangible benefits to the daily lives of Belarusian citizens. Photos and videos of the mission will be available on [EbS](#).* (For more information: Maja Kocijančič – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Alceo

Smerilli – Tel.:+32 229 64887)

Commissioner Vestager visits Berlin and participates in a Citizens' Dialogue

Commissioner for Competition, Margrethe **Vestager** travels to Germany today and will participate in a [Citizens' Dialogue](#) on "Your voice in Europe" at the Representation of the European Commission in Berlin. The Commissioner will also meet Mr Wolfgang Schäuble, President of the Bundestag and receive an award from the Schwarzkopf Foundation. The [Citizens' Dialogue](#) can be followed live [here](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Sarantopoulou – Tel.: +32 229 13740)

La Commissaire Crețu en Roumanie pour évoquer l'absorption des fonds européens

Aujourd'hui et mardi, la Commissaire à la politique régionale Corina **Crețu** est en Roumanie. La Commissaire rencontrera la nouvelle Premier ministre roumaine, Viorica Dancilă, et prononcera le discours d'ouverture de la conférence "Les fonds européens, l'absorption et la relance: comment ancrer la Roumanie dans l'année du centenaire?". "Il y a eu des progrès notables dans l'absorption des fonds européens en 2017," a commenté la Commissaire avant sa visite, "Mais il faudra redoubler d'efforts en 2018. Je viendrai apporter le soutien et l'expertise de la Commission pour utiliser aux mieux les fonds européens, et évoquer le futur de la politique de Cohésion, après 2020." (Pour plus d'informations: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Sophie Dupin de Saint-Cyr – Tel.: +32 229 56169)

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