

# European Dialogue on Skills and Migration: Employers and Commission together for the integration of migrants

Today, Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris Avramopoulos and Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne Thyssen are hosting the second meeting of the **European Dialogue on Skills and Migration**, at the [European Business Summit](#).

The Commissioners officially launched the “[Employers together for integration](#)” initiative, in the presence of CEOs and other high-level representatives of several companies committed to fostering migrant integration such as IKEA, Deutsche Telekom, NCC, Accenture, B-post, Scandic hotels, ADECCO and Microsoft as well as representatives of social and economic partners. The initiative aims to promote employers’ efforts across the EU to support the integration of refugees and other migrants in the labour market and beyond.

Dimitris **Avramopoulos**, Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, said: *“Making integration work is not just a social but an economic imperative. Only a successful integration of all migrants in the EU will allow turning migration into an opportunity, both for them and for our European society and economy. The role and engagement of employers is essential for this. I welcome the many existing efforts across Europe and invite more employers to set an example and join the “Employers together for integration” initiative launched today.”*

Marianne **Thyssen**, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, said: *“Today’s forum is a sign of commitment that we unite forces with employers. Our primary task now is to tackle the challenges and to seize the opportunities of integrating refugees and asylum seekers in the labour market. It can and should be a win-win for all.”*

Peter **Wågström**, CEO NCC, said: *“Today NCC runs a number of promising projects that promote integration and diversity. We do this first and foremost because we need more people with the right skills and we believe that diversity can create better business results. At the same time, we want to play a part in building a more inclusive society.”*

Koen **Van Gerven**, CEO Bpost, said: *“Bpost is a sizeable employer in Belgium who wants to give everyone the opportunity to work for us including refugees, long term unemployed and low skilled people. Therefore we have developed a pragmatic and socially responsible employment policy, together with several partners, to achieve this ambition of social integration.”*

Jo **Deblaere**, Chief Operating Officer and Chief Executive-Europe Accenture,

said: *“Employment is absolutely critical to empower refugees, yet even those with professional work experience and advanced education often struggle to achieve self-reliance. At Accenture, we aim to help refugees re-enter the workforce in jobs that match their skills, and we are proud to support the Commission’s initiative to help them re-claim their livelihood and independence.”*

Birgit Klesper, Senior Vice President Group Corporate Responsibility Deutsche Telekom AG, said: *“The foremost requirement for successful integration into a society is integration into the labour market. A multi-stakeholder approach is a key element to fulfilling this European-wide need. If we all act in concert – politics, policy-makers, civil society and business – a great challenge becomes a great opportunity.”*

## Background

The [European Dialogue on Skills and Migration](#) was launched in 2016 to foster exchanges between the Commission and economic and social partners, in particular employers, on labour migration related issues. For its second edition on 23 May 2017, the Dialogue focuses on the labour market integration of refugees and other legally residing migrants.

Research suggests that third-country nationals continue to face barriers to access the labour market. In 2016, third country nationals’ employment rate was 15.2 percentage points lower than that of EU nationals, with women having particularly low employment rates. Third country migrants are often under-employed, even when holding a university diploma<sup>[1]</sup>.

Failure to release the potential of third-country nationals in the EU would represent a massive waste of resources, both for the individuals concerned and more generally for our economy and society. Migrants – if well integrated – can help improve the overall performance of the labour market, as well as fiscal sustainability in the long run.<sup>[2]</sup>

That is why the Commission adopted on 7 June 2016 an [Action Plan on the integration of third-country nationals](#) to support the integration efforts of Member States. Integration can only be effective if all relevant actors play their role: EU Institutions, national and local authorities, civil society organizations. Regarding the integration on the labour market, the role of economic and social partners, and in particular employers, is crucial. Many initiatives have been taken at national level by employers, trade unions and Chambers of Commerce. The Commission, through the second edition of the European Dialogue on Skills and Migration wants to allow individual employers and other economic and social partners to share their existing and future initiatives in this area.

Through the initiative [“Employers together for integration”](#), the Commission wants to give visibility to the engagement of individual employers to support integration and encourage more to join. As from today, interested employers can join the initiative on the website of the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs of the European Commission.

In addition, following up on the [New Skills Agenda for Europe](#), the Commission is also working towards greater transparency of third-country nationals' qualifications, upskilling of low-qualified people in Europe and easier recognition of qualifications. A tool to support recognition of skills of third-country migrants will be launched soon.

The [European Social Fund](#) (ESF) is the main funding instrument supporting labour market inclusion, including of migrants. The [Asylum Migration and Integration Fund](#) (AMIF) can also provide funding for preparatory measures to access the labour market. A call for proposal under AMIF will be launched in the second part of 2017 to support initiatives by employers and social partners to promote the labour market integration of refugees and other migrants.

For More Information

[Website](#) on the European Dialogue for Skills and Migration

[Sign up](#) for “Employers together for Integration” Initiative

[Commission Action Plan](#) on the integration of third country nationals

[European Website](#) on Integration

[Repository](#) of promising practices of labour market integration and social inclusion of asylum seekers and refugees across EU Member States

[1] Eurostat, EU Labour Force Survey

[2] An Economic Take on the Refugee Crisis, DG ECFIN institutional paper, July 2016

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file\\_import/ip033\\_en\\_2.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/file_import/ip033_en_2.pdf)

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## [Daily News 23 / 05 / 2017](#)

### **Statement by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker following the attack in Manchester**

Following the attack in Manchester, European Commission President Jean-Claude **Juncker** issued a statement saying, *“It breaks my heart to think that, once again, terrorism has sought to instil fear where there should be joy, to sow division where young people and families should be coming together in celebration. (...) Today we mourn with you. Tomorrow we will work side by side with you to fight back against those who seek to destroy our way of life.”* In a [letter](#) to UK Prime Minister Theresa May, President **Juncker** conveyed his sympathy to the British people and said: *“These cowardly acts only strengthen our commitment to work together to defeat the perpetrators of such vile acts.”* The EU flags are flying half-mast today at all Commission buildings in

solidarity with the victims and their families. (For more information see the statement and letter or contact Margaritis Schinas – Tel.: +32 229 60524; Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456)

### **Commissioners Avramopoulos and Thyssen launch the initiative “Employers together for integration”**

Today, Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris **Avramopoulos** and Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne **Thyssen** delivered opening remarks on the occasion of the launch of the initiative “[Employers together for integration](#)” at the second [European Dialogue on Skills and Migration](#), taking place in the margins of the [European Business Summit](#). Commissioner **Avramopoulos** said: “Our initiative today is about expanding and upscaling the many good examples in Europe that we have on labour market integration of migrants. There is so much engagement and commitment already in Europe today by the private sector when it comes to investing in immigrant integration. We want to build on this, and multiply it all over Europe.” Commissioner **Thyssen** said: “The cost of non-integration is far greater in the long run than the cost of effective integration policies. Everyone who is rightfully in the EU should have the opportunity to participate fully in our economic, cultural and social life. However, we need to keep in mind the specific challenges that refugees and migrants coming from outside the EU face.” All interested companies can support the initiative and sign up [here](#). The event will be recorded on [EbS](#). The full press release is available [here](#) and the speeches of Commissioners **Avramopoulos** and Thyssen [here](#) and [here](#) respectively. (For more information: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456; Tove Ernst – Tel.: +32 229 86764; Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253)

### **Commission welcomes agreement on effective rules to resolve double taxation problems**

The Commission has welcomed the agreement reached today by Member States on new measures to help resolve double taxation problems for all citizens and businesses in the EU. Proposed by the Commission only seven months ago, the new rules will allow businesses and citizens to reduce double taxation, one of the biggest obstacles to the functioning of the Single Market. Double taxation occurs when the same income is taxed by two or more Member States, creating uncertainty, unnecessary cost and cash-flow problems for taxpayers. The Dispute Resolution Mechanism is essential for fair taxation: individuals and companies should pay their fair share of tax but should not have to pay it twice. Pierre **Moscovici**, Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs, said: “Today’s agreement extends the benefits of dispute resolution to all businesses and individuals and will ensure that taxpayers can benefit from a more reasonable timeframe for their cross-border tax problems to be sorted out. By agreeing to a mandatory and binding dispute resolution mechanism, Member States have taken heed of the fully-justified calls by business and individuals to have tax certainty in the EU.” In

corporate taxation alone, there are currently around 900 double taxation disputes in the EU estimated to be worth €10.5 billion in tax revenues. The new rules will ensure that when income is double taxed, taxpayers will have a clear, quick and definitive process for resolving the issue, either through agreement by the Member States concerned or through a decision of an advisory commission. Citizens and small companies will benefit from an even further simplified procedure. Once the European Parliament has issued its opinion, the new rules will be formally adopted by the Council and will apply to double taxation disputes from 1 July 2019. *(For more information: Vanessa Mock – Tel.: +32 229 56194; Patrick McCullough – Tel.: +32 229 87183)*

### **European Commission helps transport aid workers and medical material to Ebola affected areas in Democratic Republic of Congo**

As a first measure of support, the European Commission is transporting aid workers and critical medical material to the affected area in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) which is facing an outbreak of Ebola. A plane of the Commission's humanitarian aid service 'ECHO Flight' which can transport staff and equipment of up to 2,500 kg is due to take off from Kinshasa to Buta this Friday, 26 May. The request for the air logistics assistance came from UNICEF and was agreed with the DRC Ministry of Health. *"It's vital to reach the affected areas and support early efforts in tackling the latest Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The EU's humanitarian air service will help get specialised personnel and medical supplies to the northeast of the country. The EU is committed to providing further support and working closely with the national authorities, the World Health Organisation (WHO) as well as international medical NGOs and agencies,"* said Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management and EU Ebola Coordinator Christos **Stylianides**. Planes and helicopters are needed to reach the affected communities since the outbreak is reported in a remote and hard to reach area. The European Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations department (ECHO) operates a humanitarian air service known as [ECHO Flight](#), operating in African countries with hubs in Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo and Mali. In 2016, ECHO Flight transported 27 700 passengers and around 170 tonnes of cargo. *(For more information: Carlos Martin Ruiz de Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322, Daniel Puglisi – Tel.: +32 229 69140)*

### **Bathing water: More European sites meet excellent quality standards than ever before**

The quality of water at the European beaches is improving and is better than ever before. The annual bathing water quality [report](#), published today by the European Commission and the European Environment Agency, shows that more than 85% of bathing water sites monitored across Europe in 2016 met the most stringent 'excellent' quality standards. Over 96% of bathing water sites met minimum quality requirements set out under European Union rules. These sites were mostly free from pollutants harmful to human health and the environment. Karmenu **Vella**, Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, said: *'The excellent quality of European Bathing Water sites is not by chance. It is the result of hard work by dedicated professionals. It shows the importance of nurturing EU policy that promotes green jobs. This*

year the European Green Week, 29 May – 2 June, will celebrate this investment. Water technicians, flood protectors, environmental chemists, waste water managers – all play an essential role in keeping bathing water quality high'. The annual report confirms a positive 40-year trend of increasingly cleaner water at more than 21 000 beaches and swimming spots across Europe and gives a good indication where the best sites with the highest water quality are likely to be found this summer. A [press release](#), an [interactive map](#) on the performance of each bathing site and [country reports](#) are available. (For more information: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: +32 229 56172; Iris Petsa – Tel.: + 32 229 93321)

### **Fight against illegal fishing: Commission lists Saint Vincent & the Grenadines and the Comoros as uncooperative and warns Liberia**

Today, the European Commission expands the global fight against illegal fishing by listing Saint Vincent & the Grenadines and the Comoros as uncooperative. Under the [EU's rules](#) to fight and deter illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, defining a country as uncooperative is tantamount to issuing a red card which effectively bans trade in fisheries products between the EU and the country identified. A warning, which is tantamount to issuing a yellow card, was issued for Liberia to encourage necessary reforms in the governance of their fisheries. The decision to issue a red card for Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is due to the failure of the authorities to control and monitor their long distance fleet. As regards the Comoros, registration for its fleet is partly outsourced outside the island and most of the Comorian fleet operates in breach of national law and requirements in the eastern Atlantic. Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Karmenu Vella, commented: "We are showing our commitment to fight illegal fishing globally. The EU's actions in the past years created an incentive for states to take their responsibilities seriously, and implement reforms to their fisheries sector. We do not like to impose sanctions on third countries, but sometimes clear action is needed. We invite the Comoros and Saint Vincent and Grenadines to seriously step up their fight against illegal fishing so that we can reverse this decision quickly. Following today's warning to Liberia we hope their authorities choose to act quickly and correct their wrongdoings." The global value of [IUU fishing](#) is estimated at approximately 10 billion euros per year, corresponding to at least 15% of world catches. Commissioner Vella will be hosting an event showcasing the success of the EU's IUU policy at the [UN Ocean Conference](#) on 8 June in New York. A [press release](#) and a [Q&A](#) are available online. (For more information: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: +32 229 56172; Iris Petsa – Tel.: + 32 229 93321)

### **Agriculture: the Commission approves Protected Geographical Indication from Indonesia**

The Commission has approved the addition of the first product from Indonesia to the quality register of Protected Geographical Indications (PGI). There

are currently 23 geographical indications originating from 10 third countries registered. These products benefit from the same protection and market added-value than EU protected products. [‘Kopi Arabika Gayo’](#) is a coffee from the Arabica species cultivated in the Gayo highlands of Indonesia. Natural and human influences guarantee the quality reputation of the product. The coffee grows in conditions of high altitude, humidity and lower light intensity, which results in a slower maturity process. Producers traditionally use unirrigated land and fertilise organically. This denomination will be added to the list of over 1,395 products already protected. More information: webpages on [quality products](#) and [DOOR database](#) of protected products. (For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel.: + 32 229 56185; Kinga Malinowska- Tel.: +32 229 51383)

### **State aid: Commission approves reductions on cogeneration surcharges for energy-intensive companies in Germany and Italy**

The European Commission has approved under EU state aid rules reductions granted to energy-intensive companies on surcharges to finance support for cogeneration in Germany, and reductions on surcharges to finance support for cogeneration and renewables in Italy. The Commission found that both measures further EU energy and climate goals and ensure the global competitiveness of energy-intensive industries, whilst preserving competition in the EU Single Market. The Commission found that reductions from cogeneration surcharges could also be needed to make financing of cogeneration support schemes sustainable, in particular when the cogeneration surcharge is added to the renewable surcharge. Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said: *“Cogeneration both produces electricity and puts to use the heat generated in the process – this efficiency can help us reach Europe’s energy and climate goals. Today’s decisions make sure that Member States can design sustainable financing to support cogeneration, same as for renewable energy. These promote green policies whilst preserving the competitiveness of companies that are heavily dependent on energy.”* A full press release is available online in [EN](#), [FR](#), [DE](#) and [IT](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Yizhou Ren – Tel.: +32 229 94889)

### **Mergers: Commission clears the acquisition of nine wind farms in the UK by Macquarie and USSL**

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of joint control by Macquarie Group Limited (Macquarie) of Australia and Universities Superannuation Scheme Limited (USSL) of the UK, over nine wind farms from UK Green Investment Bank plc (GIB) also of the UK. The nine wind farms are located off the coast of England and Wales. Macquarie is a global investment company, banking and financial services provider with offices in 28 countries in the world. USSL is a corporate trustee responsible for managing a UK private sector pension scheme for staff in UK universities and other higher education and research institutions. The Commission concluded that the proposed transaction would raise no competition concerns as there are very minor overlaps between the companies’ activities. 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.8346](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

### **Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of a part of Sealed Air's business by Bain Capital**

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of the Diversey care division and the food hygiene and cleaning business within the Food Care division of Sealed Air Corporation, by funds managed by Bain Capital Investors, L.L.C., both of the USA. Sealed Air's acquired businesses provide (i) a variety of integrated cleaning solutions to business customers and (ii) cleaning and equipment solutions that provide automation and monitoring for food and beverage processors. Bain Capital is a private equity fund that invests in companies worldwide in many industries. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns because Bain Capital does not control any company that is active in the same markets, or in markets upstream or downstream from, or closely related to, markets in which Sealed Air's acquired businesses are active. 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.8466](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

### **Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Tourico by Cinven and CPPIB**

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of joint control over Travel Holdings Parent Corporation and its subsidiaries ("Tourico") of the USA, by Fifth Cinven Fund, managed by Cinven Capital Management (V) General Partner Limited ("Cinven") of the UK, and the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board ("CPPIB") of Canada. Tourico is a travel-related brokerage company, headquartered in Orlando, Florida. Cinven is a private equity firm engaged in the provision of investment management and investment advisory services to a number of investment funds. CPPIB is an investment management organisation which invests the funds of the Canada Pension Plan. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns given the companies' moderate combined market positions resulting from the proposed transaction and the presence of a number of strong players providing hotel intermediation services in all relevant countries. The transaction was examined under the normal merger review procedure. More information is available on the Commission's [competition website](#), in the public [case register](#) under the case number [M.8408](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **Vice-President Šefčovič in Lithuania for second Energy Union Tour**

On 23-25 May, Vice-President for Energy Union Maroš Šefčovič will travel to Lithuania for the second Energy Union Tour. The Vice-President will meet Lithuanian President Grybauskaitė, Prime Minister Skvernelis, the Ministers



for Energy, Transport and Environment and other high-level political figures and members of the parliament. Among others discussion will focus on the Commission's [Clean energy for all Europeans](#) package from November last year, the Energy Union's governance and national energy and climate plans. The synchronisation of the Baltic States' electricity grid with the continental European network will be an important item on the agenda. Further topics include the Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) terminal in Klaipeda and its role in the region. Ahead of the visit, Vice-President **Šefčovič** said: *"Security of energy supply and internal market functioning are significantly improving in Lithuania. This is a result of the LNG terminal already functioning in Klaipeda, and the development of electricity links with Poland and Sweden. The construction of the gas interconnector with Poland will further contribute to secure supplies. Now, along with the other Baltic States the country needs to move forward with connecting its electricity grids with European networks"*. Upcoming dates and more information on the 2017 Energy Union tour are available [here](#). More information on the Energy Union is available [here](#). (For more information: Anna-Kaisa Itkonen – Tel.: +32 229 56186; Anca Paduraru – Tel.: +32 229 91269; Nicole Bockstaller – Tel.: +32 229 52589)

### **Le Commissaire Moscovici participe à un dialogue citoyen à Tournai**

Pierre **Moscovici**, le Commissaire en charge des affaires économiques et financières, fiscalité et douanes, participera à un [dialogue citoyen](#) en Belgique aujourd'hui sur le thème « l'Europe dont je rêve pour 2030 », avec le soutien de la représentation de la Commission européenne en Belgique. Ce dialogue est organisé dans le cadre d'une série de débats et de discussions dans toute l'Union sur l'avenir de l'Europe, suite à la [présentation](#) du [Livre blanc](#) de la Commission. Le dialogue commencera à 18:30 CET. (Pour plus d'informations: Annika Breidhardt – Tél.: +32 229 56153; Vanessa Mock – Tél.: +32 229 56194)

### **Commissioner Jourová delivers keynote speech on the occasion of EU day against Impunity**

Today, Commissioner **Jourová** participates in a conference marking the EU Day against Impunity for serious international crimes (crime of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes), organised by the Maltese Presidency to the Council of the EU, Eurojust and the Commission. On the occasion, Commissioner **Jourová** said: *"We have to make sure that justice is served in cases of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Impunity is not an option. People who were deprived from their dignity and suffered unimaginable crimes deserve to see these criminals condemned."* The aim of this day is to raise awareness about these crimes and to improve their prosecution within the EU. While the prosecution of these crimes lies primarily with Member States and, as a last resort, international tribunals (e.g. the International Court of Justice), the Commission supports national authorities through the Eurojust, the Genocide Network hosted by Eurojust, Europol, and the European Judicial

Training Network (EJTN). More information and a video are available [online](#).  
(For more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Mélanie Voin – Tel.: +32 229 58659)

### **Outreach to Citizens: Luc Van den Brande to finalise his report**

Mr Luc Van den Brande, Special Adviser of the President Jean-Claude **Juncker** for the outreach towards Citizens, has today started a series of discussions with international experts before presenting his final report later this summer. Appointed in 2015, Luc Van den Brande was given a mandate that included the preparation of a report on how to strengthen the European Commission's dialogue with the general public. The report will take stock of the Commission's communication outreach and synergies with other European and national actors in promoting dialogue with citizens and will include a number of recommendations. Particular attention will be devoted to the local and regional dimension of communication. (For more information: Alexander Winterstein – Tel.: +32 229 93265)

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

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## **Discours d'ouverture du Commissaire Moscovici lors de la conférence de presse de l'Eurogroupe**

Cette journée a été longue. Nous n'avons pas conclu mais le travail qui a été fait est utile et a marqué d'excellents progrès.

Faisons un état des lieux. Sur la mise en œuvre des réformes : nous parlons d'un ensemble d'engagements considérables composé de mesures législatives et d'autres engagements.

Ce paquet d'"actions prioritaires" représente 140 mesures qui sont des réformes amples et profondes. Elles touchent tout le spectre: fiscal, social, administrations publiques, administrations fiscale, stabilité financière, marché de produits, industrie de réseaux et privatisations.

Aussi les mesures budgétaires additionnelles qui entreront en vigueur dès 2019 et qui représentent 4 points de PIB y compris des mesures difficiles comme sur les retraites.

Où en sommes-nous: le parlement grec a voté la semaine dernière un projet de loi "omnibus" sur 45 de ses actions.

D'autres ont été complétées en parallèle. Certaines sont en train d'être finalisées. Au total: 104 des 140 mesures sont déjà complétées. Leur nombre a encore augmenté, des progrès ont été faits: environ 110 actions sont maintenant complétées. Les autorités grecques ont pris leurs responsabilités. La Grèce a fait d'importants progrès. Je suis confiant que nous serons vite à même de conclure que la Grèce a respecté la totalité de ses engagements, ce qui doit mener à la conclusion de la revue. C'est le résultat souhaité du prochain Eurogroup.

Nous sommes dans la finalisation de ce travail et nous avons toute confiance. Cela sera fait.

Sur la dette: de longues discussions aujourd'hui dans plusieurs formats avec Jeroen, menées avec beaucoup de détermination et de minutie. Nous n'avons jamais eu une discussion sur la dette aussi détaillée et profonde. Nous n'avons pas conclu mais nous avons avancé.

Nous allons maintenant travailler pour conclure un bon accord le 15 juin. Je suis convaincu que les avancées faites ne doivent pas être perdues. C'est une très bonne base de départ pour la prochaine rencontre. La Commission reste disponible pour contribuer à ce travail et reste confiante dans les avancées qui ont été réalisées et que nous allons encore réaliser pour aboutir à l'accord que chacun attend.

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## Statement by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker following the attack in Manchester

*"It was with great sadness and profound shock that I learnt of the brutal attack that struck Manchester.*

*It breaks my heart to think that, once again, terrorism has sought to instil fear where there should be joy, to sow division where young people and families should be coming together in celebration.*

*I would like to convey my deepest sympathies to Prime Minister May and to the British people.*

*Today we mourn with you. Tomorrow we will work side by side with you to fight back against those who seek to destroy our way of life. They underestimate ours and your resilience – these cowardly attacks will only strengthen our commitment to work together to defeat the perpetrators of such vile acts."*

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## EU-Cuba High-level discussion on human rights in Brussels

On 22 May, the EU and Cuba held their third high-level discussion on human rights in Brussels.

The EU delegation was headed by EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Stavros Lambrinidis and included the Managing Director for the Americas of the European External Action Service (EEAS), Edita Hrdá, as well as other representatives of the EEAS, the European Commission and the EU Delegation to Cuba. Rodolfo Reyes Rodríguez, Director General for Multilateral Issues and International Law of the Cuban Ministry for Foreign Affairs led the Cuban side, and was accompanied by Cuban Ambassador / Head of the Mission to the EU Norma Goicochea Estenoz, as well as other officials of the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Both sides had an extensive discussion on constitutional, legal and administrative aspects of citizens' participation in public affairs, notably with regard to the recent and forthcoming elections in the EU and in Cuba, where municipal elections will take place in 2017 and a new President will be elected in 2018. The EU underlined the importance of complying with international human rights electoral standards, including free access to media and to information, freedoms of expression, association and assembly so that voices from different parts of the political spectrum can be heard and participate.

In the area of economic and social rights, the EU and Cuba addressed the coverage of social protection systems and the promotion of social dialogue. The respect for core labour standards, the fight against discrimination and the inclusion of disadvantaged groups were also raised.

The two sides moreover discussed the protection of human rights of migrants and refugees in the context of migration flows implicating Cuba and the EU, and the promotion and protection of the right to health, in particular for persons in vulnerable situations. Both sides agreed to explore the possibility of setting up a sectoral dialogue on social issues, as well as trilateral cooperation on global health in line with the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. In follow-up to the last high-level discussion on human rights, they also addressed the situation of freedom of association and expression, including ways of engagement with peaceful civil society activists in Cuba and the EU, as well as on possibilities of all civil society to freely participate in public life. Finally, the two sides explored opportunities for closer EU-Cuba cooperation in multilateral human rights fora.

The talks reconfirmed the wish of both sides to deepen their dialogue and understanding in the area of human rights, with a view to developing

cooperation to attain the objectives of the EU-Cuba partnership. The EU and Cuba affirmed their commitment for even closer engagement under the EU-Cuba Agreement on Political Dialogue and Cooperation.

## **Background**

High Representative / Vice-President Federica Mogherini and the Foreign Minister of Cuba Bruno Rodriguez agreed in April 2015 to start EU-Cuba human rights consultations, anticipating on the negotiations of a bilateral Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement. The Agreement, which was signed in December 2016, will open a new chapter in EU-Cuban relations and contains detailed provisions on the promotion of human rights, an essential element of the bilateral partnership. It notably foresees the establishment of a structured Human Rights Dialogue that will allow both sides to share experiences and best practices, build capacities, and provide training or technical cooperation to address specific issues. The application of the PDCA should thus provide significantly enhanced opportunities for further discussions and dialogue in this and all other areas covered by the Agreement.

The Agreement is currently being reviewed by the European Parliament and should soon be applied provisionally, pending its ratification by Cuba and the EU and its Member States.