

[Novel coronavirus: three cases reported in France](#)

[French health authorities have confirmed three cases of novel coronavirus \(2019-nCoV\)](#) virus in France since 24 January 2020. The first confirmed cases in Europe are not unexpected given the developments of the last few days with several 2019-nCoV cases reported in countries outside of China.

The fact that these cases were identified, proves that detection and confirmation of this novel virus is working in France, showing a high level of preparedness to prevent and control possible infections of 2019-nCoV.

Most EU countries have plans and measures in place to contain this kind of infections and Europe has well-equipped laboratories that can confirm probable cases in addition to hospitals that are prepared to treat patients accordingly. EU/EEA countries should ensure that timely and rigorous infection prevention and control measures (IPC) are applied around people diagnosed with 2019-nCoV. Such measures will keep the likelihood of further sustained spread in both healthcare and community settings low.

In the past, systematic implementation of infection prevention and control measures were effective in controlling both SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV.

ECDC is working with the EU/EEA Member States to ensure that they are prepared to manage any imported cases. ECDC is monitoring this event through epidemic intelligence activities, and provides risk assessments to guide EU Member States and the EU Commission in their response activities.

At this stage, it is likely that there will be more imported cases in Europe. Even if there are still many things unknown about 2019-nCoV, European countries have the necessary capacities to prevent and control an outbreak as soon as cases are detected.

ECDC will update its [dedicated page](#) with the recent developments in the course of the day with most recent confirmed data.

[Remarks by President Charles Michel after his meeting with President of the Republic of North Macedonia Stevo](#)

Pendarovski

Thank you very much, Mr President, for this meeting. The purpose of my visit, a few weeks after I took office at the European Council, is to deliver an ambitious first message. I have just shared with you my conviction that the future and the destiny of North Macedonia are European. And I think it is very important that in the European Council we should take the opportunity – and that is my intention at the March summit – to continue discussions on how we can keep progressing with that ambition. And the strategy I wish to propose to my colleagues in the European Council is based on three pillars.

The first pillar, which you have mentioned, is working over the coming days and weeks to try to agree on a reform and modernisation of the enlargement process. Because I have observed over some weeks that there are several European countries for which it is important to give this process more political leadership, more tangible results, and to ensure that relationships can be developed that lead to a mutual interest in which this process is clearer and stronger.

The second point is the question, which will be raised again in the European Council, of the start of negotiations with North Macedonia and with Albania. Here I would like to stress my awareness of all the efforts that have been made, the important reforms carried out and the whole process of reforms that must be kept up over the coming weeks and months, to continue to implement in particular the Prespa Agreement and the treaty of friendship with Bulgaria. I am fully conscious that the issues involved are extremely important and extremely sensitive, but that they can be moved forward.

And finally, the third point I would like to emphasise is a very powerful ambition, one which we have discussed with the President and the Prime Minister. That is the need, as I consider it, given that over the coming weeks the European Union will have to agree on its next European budget, for an investment and growth strategy for the Western Balkans. It seems to me extremely important to be able, in conjunction with these structural reforms on the rule of law, the fight against corruption and against crime, also to work on short-, medium- and long-term investment ambitions. As you see, we will have the opportunity to discuss these matters in greater depth over dinner this evening. I believe that this is an extremely important issue for this country and for the European Union.

The message I wish to give you through this visit and these meetings is that of the European Union's commitment to ensuring that there is a common European destiny. I wish also to convey another message, that of the need to continue, intensively, the dialogue we are already engaged in and which we are going to continue, because it is important to achieve unanimity in the European Council, to bring about agreement among all European countries on this common objective.

Remarks by President Charles Michel after his meeting with Prime Minister of Albania Edi Rama

First of all, I would like once again to extend my deepest condolences, personally and on the part of the European Union, with regard to the tragedy that struck your country in November, and to express our solidarity with the victims and their families. Their lives have been devastated. And I would also like to reaffirm the European Union's commitment, following the decision taken by the European Council in December with all the heads of state assembled in Brussels, to encourage the European Commission to organise the donors' conference which will take place in Brussels in a few weeks to ensure that, alongside the words of compassion, alongside the words of empathy and support, action is taken to provide real support to the people of your country.

Prime Minister, dear Edi, we have had yet another opportunity for a dialogue, one which has been intensive and useful, which is necessary, and which, as always, has been a pleasure for me. We often met when I was Prime Minister of Belgium. And today, as President of the European Council, it has been an opportunity to speak about the relationship between this country and, more generally, between the Western Balkans and the European Union. This will be a topic of discussion for the European Council in the next few weeks, and it is my responsibility to lead the talks. This is an opportunity not only to discuss but also, I hope, to take decisions on and set the markers for the future relationship between Albania and the European Union, between the Western Balkans and the European Union. As I see it, the strategy that we must attempt to develop together is made up of three pillars.

The first pillar is the need – and I would like to be able to explain this here, in your country – the need for European countries, for heads of state and government, to agree on how to approach the enlargement process in the years to come. How do European countries want to reform and modernise the enlargement process in order to make that process credible, to instil it with more trust, more political leadership? That is the discussion that European countries need to have. As you know, very soon the European Commission, having consulted the member states, will present proposals to the European Council with regard to modernising the principle and the process of enlargement.

The second pillar: as you know, just before summer last year, the European Commission presented proposals to the European Council on opening negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. The European Council will discuss this topic once again on the basis of the European Commission's new proposal. And I consider it important that we at the European Council try to

obtain clarity on the direction we would like to take for the future. We need unanimity among the member states, and that calls for an intensive, serious and solid dialogue between them. And it is my responsibility, as President of the European Council, to encourage a convergence of points of view, to enable the European Council to take decisions on this subject.

And then there is a third point which, in my view, is of central importance, because it makes it possible for us, I believe, to take some vital steps forward in connection with the first two subjects to which I have just referred. The third point is the call I wish to make, around the European Council table, for a real investment and growth pact for the Western Balkans. An investment and growth pact which will enable the various instruments at the EU's disposal to be brought into play – all possible instruments, including those for encouraging economic development, which is a key condition for improving social conditions and encouraging all forms of transnational cooperation. This is a regional approach which should contribute to the three pillars which I have just mentioned.

The destiny of this country, the destiny of the Western Balkans, must be oriented entirely towards Europe. That is a very strong conviction. And it is necessary for us to continue this narrowly-focused and regulated dialogue. This also calls for the commitment, which you have reaffirmed, to continue all efforts in terms of reform, of modernisation, of engagement in favour of the rule of law and combating organised crime. All these subjects are essential for us to continue to work together, to reaffirm, once again today, the destiny of this region which is turned towards Europe and which in the weeks and months ahead will lead us to work closely together, with this aim and this ambition.

I shall conclude by saying that we need to continue the dialogue. We need to keep up our work so that we can continue to strengthen trust and credibility, affirm political leadership, and achieve tangible results, first of all for the citizens of the countries concerned, but also so that we can take steps forward. And as I announced to you, I shall have the pleasure, on the eve of the donors' conference for your country in Brussels, of holding a meeting with all the Western Balkans leaders. It will also be an opportunity, I hope, to show and express the political impetus which we want to give. A new institutional cycle within the EU has just begun: the President of the European Commission and myself took up our posts at the beginning of December. And I wanted, very soon after taking office, by my presence here with you, to affirm very strongly and unambiguously the ambition we have to make progress towards this goal which we share. Thank you.

[EIB Vice President to highlight](#)

benefits of new investment in the Republic of North Macedonia during joint visit with European Council President

- **President and Vice President to visit Skopje waste water treatment plant that will improve public health and tackle pollution in Vardar River**
- **EIB provided EUR 1 billion for private sector, transport, energy and water since 1977**
- **Future EIB financing for priority investment to be discussed with government**

Andrew McDowell, Vice President of the European Investment Bank (EIB) will make a two-day visit to the Republic of North Macedonia later this week.

On Saturday, 25 January, the EIB Vice President and European Council (EC) President Charles Michel will visit a new wastewater treatment plant in Skopje and view first-hand how European financing is transforming wastewater treatment in Skopje and improving public health in the city.

The European Investment Bank, the EU Bank, is the world's largest international public bank and has provided nearly EUR 1 billion for new private sector, transport, energy and water investments in the country since 1977.

"The European Investment Bank has been a key partner of the Republic of North Macedonia for more than 40 years and is pleased to have worked with local and international partners to support transformational investment that deliver economic opportunities, improve lives and strengthen connections between North Macedonia and her neighbours. I am returning to Skopje for a joint visit with Charles Michel, which demonstrates the EU Bank's firm commitment to enhancing European cooperation with North Macedonia and ensuring new investments to benefit the country's citizens. This opportunity to observe in person how the EIB is successfully addressing environmental and public health challenges in the area is encouraging. This new wastewater treatment plant in Skopje will end the discharge of untreated sewage into the Vardar River. Our visit will also provide an opportunity to discuss future EIB support to strengthen the country's security of energy supply, improve international transport links and enhance business investment in the country." said Andrew McDowell, European Investment Bank Vice President ahead of the visit.

European Council President Charles Michel stated: "The European Investment Bank has contributed technical expertise, financial support and environmental and social standards to projects across Europe, including in the Republic of North Macedonia, for many years. The EIB, owned directly by European Union Member States, has improved infrastructure and enabled companies to expand across North Macedonia. My joint visit with Vice President McDowell reflects

the European Union's firm commitment to ensure that new investment and closer cooperation benefits the Republic of North Macedonia in the years ahead."

During the visit to Skopje Vice President McDowell, responsible for lending operations in the Republic of North Macedonia, and EC President Charles Michel will also discuss investment priorities with government Ministers and senior officials.

Hungary: Investment Plan – Commuters to enjoy safer, more comfortable and eco-friendly buses as EIB lends EUR 47m to Volán

- EUR 47m is the first tranche of a EUR 140m loan to Volán Buszpark Kft for safer and more eco-friendly buses on regional and city lines across Hungary;
- Covered by the Investment Plan guarantee, the loan supports Hungary in its ongoing transition towards more energy-efficient and lower-emission public transport;
- The loan will have a positive effect on the environment as the EIB delivers on its role as the EU climate bank: Volán to modernise half of its bus fleet and reduce CO₂ emissions by 38%.

Commuters in Hungary will enjoy new, faster, safer and more eco-friendly buses on regional and city lines across Hungary as a result of a EUR 47m loan the European Investment Bank (EIB) signed today with Volán Buszpark Kft, the country's biggest bus fleet management company. This is the first tranche of a EUR 140m loan approved by the EIB, which combined with commercial bank finance, will help to upgrade nearly half of Volán's bus fleet. The loan is provided under the Investment Plan's European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) as it addresses the EFSI objective of smart and sustainable urban mobility in the European Union.

With the EIB's support, Volán plans to add 3 200 new buses over the next four years and improve the energy efficiency, safety and quality of public transport in Hungary, where two-thirds of towns are reachable only by bus. In 2018, Volán transported 700 million commuters across Hungary.

Financing from the EIB, the EU's climate bank, will make a positive impact on climate and the environment. More than 450 buses, purchased under the loan for inner city routes, should run on alternative fuels, reducing pollution in Hungarian cities. The rest of the bus fleet will run on the latest EURO VI technology engines. With its new buses, Volán will reduce CO₂ emissions by up to 38% over the next four years.

EIB Vice-President **Lilyana Pavlova** said: “The loan we signed today will make travelling around Hungary more enjoyable, safer and faster. I am particularly happy to see the positive impact this project will have on the environment and pollution in Hungary and Europe alike. I would like to thank Volán for the opportunity to make everyday life better for Hungarians and, as the EU’s climate bank, for the opportunity to do something tangible for our environment.”

European Commissioner for the Economy **Paolo Gentiloni** said: “This financing under the Investment Plan is a great example of how the EU is helping Member States in their transition to low-emission mobility. Our support will not only reduce CO₂ emissions in Hungary’s transport sector, but also make travelling safer and more comfortable for commuters on new eco-friendly buses.”

CEO of Volánbusz Zrt. and Volán Buszpark Kft. **Ilona Dávid** said: “The main objective of Volán Buszpark Kft. is to support VOLÁNBUSZ Zrt., the company providing interurban public passenger transport services, with a fleet of vehicles meeting the requirements of the modern age, and thus to continuously improve the quality of community road transport. In addition to increasing the comfort of passengers, the main consideration is to improve working conditions, so when selecting buses we also make certain that the buses support bus drivers as efficiently as possible in order for them to drive safely and comfortably. We also consider it our duty for our fleet of vehicles to be as low-emission as possible which can only be achieved by purchasing new vehicles.”

Towards a more eco-friendly Hungary!

The EIB loan supports the Government of Hungary in the ongoing transition towards more energy-efficient and lower-emission public transport in the country and complements current efforts to create an efficient public transport network through an integrated bus and railroad network. The loan also contributes to national strategies on transport and environment and helps Hungary meet the requirements set in the Paris Climate Agreement. Hungary was the first EU Member State to ratify the Paris Climate Agreement in 2016.

Note to editors:

EIB in Hungary:

EIB lending commitments in Hungary since the start of the Bank’s activity in the country are currently close to EUR 21.6 bn. Between 2008 and 2018 alone the EIB signed for support worth EUR 13.2 bn. EIB operations cover important sectors of the Hungarian economy, including transport, the environment, energy infrastructure, manufacturing and services. Another key component of the Bank’s activity in Hungary is the promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by increasing SME access to long-term financing through local financial institutions. Since 2001, the EU bank has supported 5 172 Hungarian SMEs sustaining 263 767 jobs in the process.

About Volán:

Volánbusz Zrt. is a passenger bus company founded more than 90 years ago, which now provides its services with nearly 6 500 vehicles. In terms of the number of employees, it has grown into the third largest state-owned company in Hungary. The core business activity of the company is to provide regular public bus transport services nationwide. VOLÁN Buszpark Kft. is a state-owned for-profit company operating as the main fleet management company of VOLÁNBUSZ Zrt. The company aims to renew its fleet of vehicles in the framework of a coordinated bus purchasing strategy and to manage the financing of vehicle purchases, thereby contributing to the improvement of service levels.

About Hungarian National Strategy:

The need for bus replacement enabled by the law is set out in Hungary's National Transport Strategy (NTS) towards sustainable public transport growth and is one of the main policy measures of the Transport Energy Efficiency Improvement Action Plan (TEEIAP) and the National Energy Efficiency Action Plan (NEEAP) for 2020. Hungary was the first EU Member State to approve the Paris Agreement early in 2016, and since then the State has already adopted (in May 2017) the new National Climate Change Strategy (NCCS-2).