

Remarks by Commissioner Bieńkowska at the press conference on the Juncker Plan at work and the Single Market in a changing world

In March the European Council asked us to present the state of play of the Single Market along with an assessment of remaining barriers and opportunities for the future. When leaders discuss the future of the single market at the European Council in mid-December, I hope that they will renew their commitments to the single market – not only in words, but also in deeds.

We need to look into the future. With this communication we are offering some avenues for the future.

It is important to underline that in our studies we have documented that – at the moment – economic growth in the world, unfortunately, takes mainly place outside the EU. Our competitors are continent-sized economies.

The Single Market needs everybody in the EU to play by the commonly agreed rules. And just as we are resisting protectionism outside the EU, we should also resist the fragmentation inside the EU. Member States need to be vigilant in implementing and applying EU rules and refrain from creating new barriers in areas such as cross-border service provision, especially in such areas as cross border service provision.

In particular, I am convinced that we should shift the narrative from traditional “completing the Single Market” to a new narrative of the Single Market as a delivery tool for welfare to the citizens, industrial competitiveness, our standing and influence in the world. The traditional narrative of “completing the Single Market” means only ticking the boxes. And this is not the right approach now.

Lack of progress on notification procedure, car emissions, food labelling, and many others have been conducted and driven by such an approach – by ticking the boxes, by only “completing the single market”. Member States do like very much to concentrate on what they feel is good for them and to avoid what is more problematic. This is my experience of dealing with more than 1000 infringements today.

The message that the Single Market is good for the economy, for business, for workers, for consumer has to come out more clearly. We have to be more precise on the issue of servitisation and the role of services for the competitiveness of our industries is fully developed in the draft.

Similarly, how the Single Market supports our trade agenda and how we need to be much more consistent and ambitious on enforcement – are issues which

together with our competition rules will be key for our future policies in that area.

Therefore, we also call on Member States, with the European Parliament, to urgently adopt the key proposals on the table before the end of this legislature. Since the beginning of the mandate we have presented 67 proposals directly relevant for the proper functioning of the Single Market. 44 of them remain to be agreed. This needs to change.

You see, on the level of declarations: everybody loves the Single Market. But when it comes down to actual proposals, such as the ones this Commission has put forward in the area of services, it's a different story.

Let me add a quick word about the action plan on standardisation that we have also adopted today. Standards like the A4 paper size or airbags, or in the future 5G technology, are sometimes seen as a technical issue. But they have an important economic impact and benefit companies and consumers in the Single Market every day. That is why today we commit to doing our part for the standardisation system to be more efficient and transparent.

So in nutshell, our message today is that the EU needs to show leadership and political courage to take the Single Market to a new level. A fully functioning Single Market, together with a properly functioning standardisation system, will make the Union even more attractive to international trading partners and provide it with additional leverage on the international stage.

Remarks by Vice-President Katainen at the press conference on the Juncker Plan at work and the Single Market in a changing world

Welcome to today's press conference. We have three communications, which all are interlinked: one on the Investment Plan for Europe or Juncker Plan if you want, one on the Single Market and finally one on European harmonised standards. They all have an impact to our economic growth and to the modernisation of the EU economy. But before going to the substance, let me say a few words about the context. In six months European citizens will have the opportunity to elect the next European Parliament.

My message to them today is: have your say on what kind of Europe you want – but don't take Europe for granted.

Don't take it for granted that you have the freedom to live or work in

another European country, like 17 million Europeans already do.

That the cost of phone calls has fallen by two thirds and you can roam for free.

That you have more control over your personal data than ever.

That we have the strictest rules on food, health and toy safety, for instance.

That you can claim compensation if your flight is delayed.

That you can cancel or return online purchases within 14 days.

That the Investment Plan for Europe has supported more than 750,000 jobs.

So, don't take any of this for granted. All of this has been done because we have wanted to deepen our probably the most precious asset: the Single Market. And we have worked together in order to boost investment. There are also forces who are either intentionally or unintendedly erecting barriers to our internal trade. That's why all those issues cannot be taken for granted. Single Market is not an asset which you can fully complete. The market and technologies are changing all the time. Think of, for instance, artificial intelligence or the circular economy. Both are the drivers of economic growth in the coming years. They are the megatrends in the world economy and it means that we have to reshape our Single Market to enable frictionless market within the EU and promote growth. Single Market is also the reason why EU is so attractive for foreign direct investments. It means more jobs, more competition and more productivity in our economy. Productivity is the best friend of welfare society. Single Market is also the reason why we have managed to get good trade agreements with third countries. Many countries are willing to have an agreement with us because it allows them to get an access to the EU Single Market. The Single Market is also the way to set global standards, for instance on product safety, energy efficiency or, for instance, GDPR is a good example. And in the future we could have global standards on the quality of plastics. So are we the ones that set the standards or are we the ones who adapt to the standards which the others have set? That's why Single Market is a much wider concept than someone might think. Technology is changing, people's demands are changing and market is changing. This is not just a message to citizens and businesses. It's also a message to our Member States and the European Council, which we expect to devote due attention to this matter. Because there is now a real urgency to act if you want to maintain growth and competitiveness in Europe. This matter deserves due attention at all levels. Elzbieta will present the Single Market communication and the harmonised standards communication in a little while. But let me say also a couple of words on the Investment Plan communication. I must say that Investment Plan for Europe has been a success story. It has brought investment back to sustainable level in Europe. Four years on, we can clearly say that that it was exactly the right thing to do. It has been a game-changer, in the way we used public money to crowd in private investment into projects that modernise our economy and help start-ups to thrive.

The EFSI, the financial leg of Investment Plan, has covered roughly speaking one third of the investment gap we had when we started this programme. I give you a couple of figures on the EFSI. EFSI has already mobilised €360 billion worth of investments, two-thirds of which come from private resources. So it shows that it functions exactly as we wanted it to function. By using public guarantees, we could crowd-in private liquidity which was resting in the bank accounts.

Now they are in productive work. 850,000 small and medium sized businesses are set to benefit from improved access to finance. Estimates show, that already now EFSI supported some 750,000 jobs, while 1.4 million jobs will be created by 2020. The EFSI has already now increased EU GDP by 0.6%. By 2020 we expect the increase to be 1.3%. The biggest users of EFSI when looking at EFSI investment per countries' GDP are Greece number one, Estonia second, Portugal third, Spain fourth, fifth is Lithuania, sixth: Latvia, seventh: Bulgaria, Poland is eighth, Finland ninth and Italy tenth. 33% of EFSI financing has gone to small and medium enterprises, 21% to research and development and innovation, 19% to energy and 11% to digital.

But EFSI is only the financial leg of the Investment Plan. The entire Investment Plan consists of three areas: EFSI, but then also the advisory hub and the project portal and finally structural reforms both at national and European levels. European structural reforms mean for instance: Capital Markets Union initiatives, Energy Single Market initiatives, everything related to the Single Market strategy. I also must mention the circular economy proposals which are modern examples of deepening the Single Market. And I must also say that since we started the focus on national reforms, many of our Member States have done significant reforms to cut red tape and make the business environment more favourable for growth and investment. So, I will stop here and pass on the floor to Elzbieta who will give you further information as to other proposals.

Speech by European Commissioner Jourová at Seimas (Lithuanian Parliament) on New Unity or Old Divisions – Europe at the crossroads

Dear chair of the plenary,

Dear members of the Seimas,

Dear Minister Linas Linkevičius,

I am honoured to speak to you here in the Seimas today, especially in this

unique year when you celebrate the 100th anniversary of the restored State of Lithuania.

The Lithuanian history could be a lesson of heroism and determination in fighting to preserve your language, your culture and finally in creating your State.

You used not only force, but you were also smart. Only the smart nation can invent a word '*knygnešiai*', meaning roughly 'book carriers'; a necessary profession in times when the Russian empire forbid the press in your language.

Throughout the history Lithuanians showed many times that you want to take the future of your country in your own hands.

In many ways, today's Europe is at the crossroads, and I am confident that your past could be a lesson for the entire Europe, because we also need to take fate in our own hands – if we want to survive.

Europe's past and the Europe of today – challenging times

More than sixty years ago, an 'Iron Curtain' between East and West divided Europe.

Many in Europe, in my country and in yours, lived without freedom, without democracy, in constant fear of ever-powerful state police.

Today, five hundred million European citizens enjoy a unique diversity of culture and traditions in a Union covering four million square kilometres.

But, today, we face new threats to our stability and security – from the inside and outside of the European Union.

We've been confronted with huge financial crisis, unemployment, untamed globalisation and digital revolution, brain drain, finally terrorism and migration crisis, not to mention the biggest crisis in the EU in the living memory – Brexit.

All of this has its impact.

Everywhere I go I hear two main things that people expect politicians to deal with: inequality and uncertainty. Many people tell me that they have a feeling that justice is only for the powerful and that political class abandoned their interests. Many people simply feel afraid again.

That's why people turn to unhealthy nationalism or to populist movements that promise simple, yet dreadful solutions.

On top of that, the alliances we have known for generations start shaking. The transatlantic relations are undergoing a transformation under the current US President. The Russian threat, which was considered by many as something of the past, seems to be well alive, online and offline. China has become an assertive economic and political player.

European Elections in May 2019

This is the scene setter for the upcoming European Elections in May 2019. But I would like to warn against treating those elections as business as usual.

This time many of us worry not only about the outcome of elections but also about foreign meddling and disinformation in election processes – whether at the European or at the national level.

The Cambridge Analytica case sent shockwaves through our democratic systems.

On top of that, Russia has been identified as one of the main sources. Our team working on this since 2015 has identified over 4,000 cases of pro-Kremlin disinformation. Europeans expect us to remain vigilant. In fact, 7 in 10 Europeans including 66% of Lithuanians are concerned about disinformation online.

We cannot stay idle when the enemies of our democracy use modern technologies to manipulate our elections.

Lithuania's efforts to counter disinformation are one of the most advanced in the entire EU and we can only learn from you.

But we've also acted on the European level.

We have proposed an election package to quickly detect potential threats, swiftly enforce existing rules online and strengthen transparency.

And we have the most modern data protection rules, known as GDPR, that apply also to political parties and other actors in the electoral context.

Defining and defending Europe's values

In these elections in many places in Europe also the simple existence of the EU will be questioned. People will ask what the EU is good for. To answer that question, it's good to recall where we came from.

Those of you who are a bit older, who are around my age, would remember how jealously we looked at the young EU, known then as European Communities, not because they were rich, but because they had freedoms we couldn't even dream of.

The EU's founding fathers realised that the price to pay for lack of basic human values is high and decided to enshrine them in the law; values like fairness, democracy, equality before the law and respect for minorities.

Yet, today we witness forces that question those basic values also in the EU; forces that want the return of power with no restraint, without checks and balances such as free media or independent courts.

Yet, we still remember that it is life without individual rights that is the source of fear.

The sad part is that those forces managed to build a contradiction between security and democracy. But it is democracy that offers the protection of its values to everyone, regardless of your birth status, connections or wealth.

And the rule of law is the bedrock of our democracy. Without it, the free press will eventually be attacked and labelled as fake news. Consumers will not be able to challenge the well-connected businesses, and we all won't be able to enforce our rights, either against the government or the companies who cheat on us or abuse our data. Without it we will not have trust in each other, and we will in the long run not have a functioning Single Market.

Bringing East and West together

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the last five years many people have asked me what is it that we have in common, the East with the West, the Lithuanians with the Portuguese, the Czechs with the Swedes.

The answer is that what unites us is the respect for these basic values. Then we can differ all we want, like true democratic Europeans, but we have to respect those basic foundations.

But we have much more work to do if we want to build a Union of equal opportunities and equal obligations. To that end, we need to also build more bridges between the West and the East of our Union.

We have to overcome the still existing economic and social disparities between East and West.

Lithuania has been doing very well in this regard in the last years. You have reached almost 80% of EU's average wealth in 2017, up from around 50% in 2005.

But still there are many of our children and grandchildren leaving the country and heading to the west or the north because they don't see sufficient opportunities here.

We need to change that! I want young people in the European Union to have equal chances to find the best education and a good job no matter where they are born.

This is why I'm convinced that we have to put much more effort in creating economic opportunities by bringing more investments to the eastern part of Europe. And this cannot only be by the cohesion fund. The EU can help to create conditions to attract foreign direct investment and to bring well-paid jobs in innovative sectors.

This is already the case in Lithuania when it comes to life sciences. Biotechnology, medical devices and pharmaceutical industries are booming in your country and you are becoming a capital for this type of jobs not only in the region, but in the whole of Europe.

We need to strengthen the European investment funds and put more money into research and innovation. Our research and innovations program "Horizon+" will be funded with 100 Billion Euros for 2021-2027. You have to use this money wisely.

But we also have to realise that the next 7 year budget, will be a Brexit budget and that the net payers to the EU budget will look at every Euro twice before spending.

So, it's time to think of reserving the EU funds for those who respect these very basics rights and values we have talked about earlier. I don't want to punish any country, but in the future, our common funds should be invested in those that don't question the very core of Europe's soul.

The Light Touch Commission

In a year's time we will have the new Commission. I am hoping to hear from you what you think the next Commission should do, but for me, this should be a Commission of light touch when it comes to regulation, but hard enforcement of the existing rules, so it's not cheap to cheat.

Take the dual food quality for instance. Selling the same product with different ingredients in two EU countries should be illegal. So, I have proposed the legislation to ban such practices and I hope the European Parliament will manage to vote on it still next year.

But, I truly believe that there are things that can be better regulated on the national or even the regional or local level.

So we should take the concerns of many people about subsidiarity seriously and really focus on the core tasks for the EU. We should do less, but better and faster to address the real problems of the people. We should be smart, brave, but not intrusive, exactly like your book carriers.

And we should be a strong actor at the global stage. We need a united Europe that defends its interest in international trade, in particular against rising protectionism. We need an assertive Europe that is a player in international rule making, show that we can set examples which become an international reference point, as we did on data protection. And we need to strengthen our cooperation in new areas to defend ourselves better in international security and defence matters.

The times we live in seem so dramatic and challenging that it is easy to think it has never been worse. But our parents and grandparents do remember much worse.

We, together, have created the most ambitious project in the world, the European Union. The Union with the highest employment rights, with strict rules for food safety and clean water, the Union without borders and with one currency.

Simply, there was never a better time to live in Europe.

But we have many challenges ahead and we have to fight to defend our values and fight for people's hearts and minds.

We can only do that if we have the courage to listen to the people and ask humbly to trust us to solve their problems.

We can only do that if we can show that the European Union can be assertive and can defend its people.

We need a European Union that is united by values, economically strong and that takes its fate into its own hands – just like the Lithuanians did 100 years ago.

Thank you for your attention.

[Illegal online gambling scheme dismantled](#)

12 November 2018

✘ After a 15-month investigation conducted by the Portuguese Public Prosecutor's Office, and with the assistance of Eurojust and Europol, judicial and law enforcement authorities in Portugal and Luxembourg successfully dismantled an organised criminal group (OCG) of more than one hundred people. In one year, the OCG's profits were estimated at EUR 80 million in activities involving illegal online gambling, money laundering and tax fraud.

Between 6 and 8 November, Operation *Shadow Game* led to a total of 267 searches in Portugal and 8 searches in Luxembourg, resulting in the seizure of EUR 576 000, approximately 3 000 computers and tablets used in illegal gambling, 428 pieces of hardware, 22 firearms and 86 vehicles. More than EUR 6 million in criminal assets was recovered. Thirty people were arrested, 29 in Portugal and 1 in Luxembourg, and 14 commercial companies were charged with criminal activity.

The OCG operated since 2015 in several EU Member States and internationally.

The operation was led by the Portuguese Public Prosecution Office (PPO), and was carried out by the Fiscal Action Unit of the Portuguese Republican National Guard (*Unidade de Ação Fiscal da Guarda Nacional Republicana*) and several territorial police departments, with the cooperation of the judicial and law enforcement authorities of Luxembourg. The international coordination would not have been possible without the coordination of Eurojust, which

assisted with the issuing of European Investigation Orders and freezing orders, and the support of Europol.

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[Belgian fugitive detained in Spain](#)

□ Eurojust and Europol cooperate successfully with national authorities

20 November 2018

✘ With the support of Eurojust and Europol, the Spanish judicial authorities (*Juzgado de Instrucción no 1* in Torre Vieja) and the Belgian Public Prosecutor's Office and judicial authorities, in coordination with the Spanish *Guardia Civil* and the Belgian Federal Police, arrested a Belgian fugitive, described as 'very dangerous', in Torre Vieja, Spain.

The action day, which took place on 7 November, was prepared by the Eurojust Belgian and Spanish Desks, which liaised directly with their national authorities. The Belgian and Spanish magistrates worked together in Spain to draft the European Arrest Warrant, and direct the arrest, as well as the searches and seizures of three houses and a restaurant in Spain, resulting in the shutdown of the restaurant used to launder the money and the freezing of two properties, bank accounts and a vehicle, as well as documents, electronic devices, credit cards and a substantial amount of cash.

The suspect escaped from Belgium in January 2018 after committing more than 20 extremely violent robberies. He had then been sought by the Belgian authorities. The suspect belonged to an organised crime group and is the alleged perpetrator of other crimes, such as drug trafficking and the illegal trade of firearms. The Belgian Federal Police suspected the fugitive could be hiding in Torre Vieja, and requested the cooperation of the Spanish *Guardia Civil*, which launched an investigation and surveillance activities. The investigation revealed that the fugitive laundered the illicit proceeds derived from his criminal activity in Belgium through a restaurant in Spain – a cash-intensive business – and then reinvested the money in real estate.

Europol provided analytical support during the investigation by cross-checking data and facilitating information exchange.

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