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Leaders' Meeting on refugee flows along the Western Balkans route: State of Play

On Wednesday 21 October, President **Juncker** called for a Leaders' Meeting on refugee flows along the Western Balkans route. The aim is to improve cooperation and step up consultation between the countries along the route and decide on pragmatic operational measures that can be implemented immediately to tackle the refugee crisis in that region. The past weeks have shown that the challenge will not be solved through national actions. Only a collective, cross-border approach based on cooperation can succeed. This is why President **Juncker** convened the leaders of the countries concerned and most affected by the emergency situation along the Western Balkans route. The current list of confirmed participants includes:

Country	HSG - nom	Function
AT	HE Mr Werner Fayman	Federal Chancellor of Austria
BG	HE Boyko Borissov	Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria
DE	HE Dr Angela Merkel	Federal Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany
FYROM	HE Gjorge Ivanov	President of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
GR	HE Mr Alexis Tsipras	Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic
HR	HE Mr Zoran Milanovic	Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia
HU	HE Mr Viktor Orbán	Prime Minister of Hungary
RO	HE Mr Klaus Iohannis	President of Romania
Serbia	HE Mr Aleksandar Vucic	Prime Minister of Serbia

SI	HE Dr Miro Cerar	Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia
European Council	HE Mr Donald Tusk	President of the European Council
European Parliament	HE Mr Martin Schulz	President of the European Parliament
Council	HE Mr Jean Asselborn	President of the Council, Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Luxembourg
UNHCR	HE Mr António Guterres	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
FRONTEX EASO	Mr Fabrice Leggeri	Executive Director
European Asylum Support Office	Dr Robert K. Visser	Executive Director

The media advisory can be found [here](#), deadline to register is today, 12:00.

EU helps Slovenia cope with refugee crisis

Ahead of the Leaders Meeting on the Western Balkans Migration Route on 25 October, Commissioners Dimitris **Avramopoulos** and Violeta **Bulg** were yesterday in Ljubljana to offer EU technical and financial support and assistance to Slovenia as it copes with a large number of arrivals. The Commissioners met with Prime Minister Miro Cerar, Foreign Affairs Minister Karl Erjavec and Minister of Interior Affairs Vesna Györkös Žnidar who informed them about the situation on the ground. Migration and Home Affairs Commissioner, Dimitris **Avramopoulos** [said](#): *"The Commission stands by Slovenia and is here to help. We need a joint European response, and this means that everyone needs to play by the rules. The Leaders meeting this Sunday, called by President Juncker, is the response to the Slovenian request for a coordinated approach, mediated by Commission."* Shortly after the visit, Slovenia activated the EU's Civil Protection Mechanism for material support such as blankets, sleeping bags, winter tents, beds and sanitary equipment to help cope with the arrivals of large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers in the country. The European Commission's Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) is working closely with the Slovenian authorities and the other participating states in the Mechanism to coordinate a swift response to the request. "The EU stands with Slovenia at this time of need. Member States can make a real difference by providing practical support to help the most vulnerable. As temperatures drop with winter approaching, emergency supplies will be more important than ever," said EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, Christos **Stylianides**. A factsheet on the Civil Protection Mechanism is available [here](#).

Commission Opinion finds temporary reintroduction of border controls by Germany and Austria to be in line with the Schengen Borders Code

The European Commission has found that the initial reintroduction of controls at internal borders by Germany and Austria were in compliance with the Schengen Borders Code. In its [Opinion](#) published today on the necessity and proportionality of the controls at internal borders as temporarily reintroduced by Germany and Austria on 13 and 16 September respectively, and subsequently prolonged, the Commission recognises that the decisions were *"motivated by the serious threat to the internal security and public policy caused by the extraordinary influx of persons seeking international protection"*, and therefore finds the temporary measures to have been justified. With regards to Hungary's decision to temporarily reintroduce

border controls at its external border with Slovenia, the Commission will publish a separate Opinion after assessing the details. In today's Opinion, the Commission also welcomes Slovenia's decision to discontinue, as of 16 October, the temporary border controls it had introduced at its internal border with Hungary on 17 September. A press release with more details is available [here](#).

State aid: Commission approves issuance of additional subordinated debt by Ethias

The European Commission has found proposed amendments to the restructuring plan of the Belgian insurer Ethias to be in line with EU state aid rules. In particular, the Commission has agreed to a proposed capital increase in Ethias through the issuance of additional subordinated debt. Ethias has already successfully implemented a large part of its restructuring plan (previously approved by the Commission in [May 2010](#) and amended in [June 2014](#)) and its non-life insurance activities generate significant profits. However, Ethias has to strengthen its solvency position in view of stricter regulatory requirements which will enter into force in January 2016 (a harmonised prudential framework for insurance companies in the EU known as "[Solvency II](#)" Directive). The restructuring plan requires Ethias to pay dividends to its public shareholders provided its capital position permits, as part of the measures aimed at reducing competition distortions created by the state aid granted to Ethias. The Commission has found that the amount of new subordinated debt to be issued will be limited and will therefore not unduly affect the remuneration level paid by Ethias to its public shareholders in return for aid previously granted. Indeed, the Commission's assessment showed that Ethias will in the first place significantly strengthen its capital base by management measures (investment, reinsurance, cost cuttings, etc) before drawing on subordinated debt for a limited part of Ethias's capital position. More information is available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the [public case register](#) under the case number [SA.43306](#).

Mergers: Commission clears joint acquisition of French hydrocarbons storage company by Ardian and EDF

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of joint control over Géosel Manosque by Ardian and Electricité de France, all of France. Géosel Manosque provides underground storage and associated transportation capacity for hydrocarbons in the South of France. Ardian is globally active in private equity and asset management in relation to various sectors, including energy. Electricité de France is active in various countries in the production, transmission, distribution and supply of electricity as well as in the sale of natural gas. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, because the companies' activities do not overlap. 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.7788](#)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of certain bauMax Do-It-Yourself retail stores in Slovakia, Slovenia and the Czech Republic by OBI

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of certain assets of bauMax AG in Slovakia, Slovenia and the Czech Republic by OBI Group Holding SE & Co. KGaA. Both OBI, based in Germany, and bauMax, headquartered in Austria, operate Do-It-Yourself retail stores in several European countries. In August 2015, the Commission had referred the parts of the transaction relating to Austria to the Austrian Competition Authority for an assessment under national competition rules, at the request of the merging companies. For the parts of the transaction examined by the Commission, the Commission concluded that the proposed transaction would raise no competition concerns as the companies' combined market shares would be modest. The operation was assessed under the simplified merger procedure. More information is available on the Commission's [competition](#) website in the public [case register](#) under the case number [M.7677](#).

EUROSTAT: Government debt fell to 92.2% of GDP in euro area

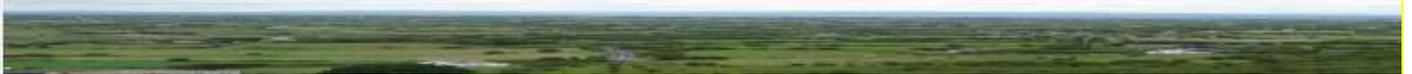
At the end of the second quarter of 2015, the government debt to GDP ratio in the **euro area** (EA19) stood at 92.2%, compared with 92.7% at the end of the first quarter of 2015. In the **EU28**, the ratio decreased from

88.1% to 87.8%. Compared with the second quarter of 2014, the government debt to GDP ratio fell in the **euro area** (from 92.7% to 92.2%) and rose in the **EU28** (from 87.3% to 87.8%). A Eurostat press release is available [here](#).

EUROSTAT: Seasonally adjusted government deficit down to 2.0% of GDP in the euro area

In the second quarter of 2015, the seasonally adjusted general government deficit to GDP ratio stood at 2.0% in the euro area (EA19), a decrease compared with 2.1% in the first quarter of 2015. In the EU28, the deficit to GDP ratio stood at 2.4%, a decrease compared with 2.5% in the previous quarter. A Eurostat press release is available [here](#).

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Find out [here](#) what will be discussed next week in the European Commission, European Council and the European Parliament.

