



European  
Commission

# The EU in 2018



HIGHLIGHTS



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1. A tram emblazoned with the InvestEU campaign image. InvestEU is the final part of this Commission's Investment Plan for Europe, which bypassed its investment target of €315 billion in July 2018. (© European Union)
2. Council President Donald Tusk, British Prime Minister Theresa May, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, US President Donald Trump, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, French President Emmanuel Macron, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe, Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte and Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker pose for a group photo during the G7 summit in Quebec, Canada, 8 June 2018. (© European Union)
3. Climate activist Greta Thunberg speaking at the United Nations COP24 Climate Change Conference in Katowice, Poland, 4 December 2018. (© Associated Press)
4. Antonio Tajani, President of the European Parliament. (© European Union)
5. Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission. (© European Union)
6. Donald Tusk, President of the European Council. (© European Union)
7. Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and US President Donald Trump at a press conference on EU-US trade relations at the White House, Washington, United States, 25 July 2018. (© European Union)
8. World leaders gather during the ceremony marking the First World War armistice centenary, Paris, France, 11 November 2018. (© European Union)
9. Council President Donald Tusk, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe and Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker after the signing of two landmark agreements between the EU and Japan, Tokyo, Japan, 17 July 2018. (© European Union)
10. The European Economic and Social Committee hosts the first European Citizens' Panel, which was convened to prepare a public consultation on the Future of Europe. A group of 96 European citizens from 27 Member States worked together to draft a 12-question online consultation, Brussels, Belgium, 5-6 May 2018. (© European Union)
11. MEPs during a plenary session of the European Parliament, Strasbourg, France. (© European Union)
12. 1A meeting of the College of Commissioners, Brussels, Belgium. (© European Union)
13. A European Council Summit, Brussels, Belgium. (© European Union)

# The EU in 2018

## HIGHLIGHTS

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### **The EU in 2018 — Highlights**

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European Commission President  
Jean-Claude Juncker

## Foreword

In 2018 we celebrated what it is to be European. The European Year of Cultural Heritage brought to life Europe's rich diversity and celebrated the principles that unite us: the values that we share, the peace and freedom that were so hard won, the rule of law and the respect for human rights and human dignity that can never be taken for granted.

There were reminders throughout the year of just how much was sacrificed for these values and rights. We commemorated together the centenary of the end of the First World War, which cost the lives of so many millions. We celebrated together the 100th anniversary of several of our Member States who claimed their freedom at the end of the war. We remembered together the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And we honoured together the 50th anniversary of the Prague Spring.

All of this reminds us how far we have come but also how much we must remain vigilant in the fight for freedom and democracy. And it brought into sharp focus the responsibility of our generation to leave a stronger, more united and more democratic Europe to our children. This has been the driving force of the European Commission over the last year, as we continue to deliver on the things that matter the most. The results speak for themselves.

The European economy is firmly back on its feet and continues to grow. More Europeans are in work than ever before, with 239 million people currently in work. Twelve million of those jobs have been created since the start of this Commission. Youth unemployment is at its lowest since 2008, although still too high. And investment is back, thanks to the €370 billion worth of investments triggered by the Juncker Plan.

The European Single Market, at 25 years old, goes from strength to strength. Many barriers have been removed but more can be done. We have made everyday life easier for Europeans — from movie and music subscriptions that travel with you across the EU, to better protection for holidaymakers and ending discrimination for online shoppers.

Our trade agreement with Canada is already showing positive results and we can expect the same from the deal we signed with Japan in July. Almost

74 000 EU companies are already exporting to Japan — selling everything from biscuits to fireplaces — and providing jobs to more than 600 000 Europeans.

The new Africa–Europe Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs that I announced in September during my State of the Union address will take the EU’s partnership with Africa to the next level. It would help create up to 10 million jobs in Africa in the next five years alone.

We continue to make the EU a safer place to live and work. We have taken action to remove the means for terrorists to commit their crimes and are tackling terrorist content online. New rules are helping law enforcement officers to better trace criminal networks and we are bolstering our defences against cyber-attacks. We are protecting Europeans online thanks to new data protection rules that came into effect in May. And we are helping to make the planet safer by making our roads safer and our air cleaner. Europe once again led the way in December in Katowice when the world agreed on a new rulebook to implement the Paris Agreement on fighting climate change.

Our migration policy is working. The numbers of people arriving has fallen dramatically; EU operations have helped rescue 690 000 people at sea since 2015 and we are taking our responsibility for helping refugees, both inside and outside our Union. At the same time, we are better protecting our border and have proposed to further strengthen the European Border and Coast Guard with an additional 10 000 European border guards by 2020. We are fighting the root causes of irregular migration with partners across the world, while working to open legal pathways to the EU to attract highly skilled workers from other parts of the world.

As we look to the year ahead, we see a year of democracy and debate. The European elections in May will be, after the Indian general election, the second largest elections anywhere in the world in 2019. People of all ages across Europe are making their voices heard as never before, and it is the duty of parliamentarians, governments and policymakers to engage as never before.

This is why I made debate and dialogue a top priority for this Commission, because Europe belongs to us all, and every European should be able to shape the future of our Union. I was honoured to take part in the 1 000th Citizens’ Dialogue in Freiburg, Germany in October and I look forward to seeing the debate continue across our Union throughout the year.

The main message from this debate is that Europeans expect their Union to deliver for them. They do not care about proposals but about how actual laws improve their lives. This will be our driving force until the very last day of our mandate. There is still a lot more work to do: all the proposals and initiatives on our 10 priorities that we announced in 2014 are on the table. Our focus is firmly on delivering them.

This will be the best message for Europeans to take to the polls. And it will be the best symbol for leaders to take to the informal Summit in Sibiu on 9 May 2019. It will be a time to set the priorities for the new Union of 27

for the next five years and to back up that ambition by agreeing in principle on a long-term EU budget that will deliver on the promises that have been made.

Sibiu, the elections and all of 2019 will be decisive for our Union in many ways. It is an opportunity for us to build solid foundations for the future, to show that Europe is listening to its citizens, and to deliver on the things that matter the most.

This is our duty to those who sacrificed so much for us. And it is our responsibility to all of those that will follow.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of connected strokes that form a stylized, somewhat abstract shape.

Jean-Claude Juncker

## THE EU IN 2018 PRIORITY 1

**'My first priority as Commission President will be to strengthen Europe's competitiveness and to stimulate investment for the purpose of job creation.'**

*Jean-Claude Juncker, political guidelines, 15 July 2014*

© Fotolia



# A new boost for jobs, growth and investment

Europe's economy performed well in 2018 and looks set to keep growing. After nearly 6 years of continuous growth, Member States are also showing an increasing degree of economic convergence, which benefits people in all parts of the EU. The Commission has delivered on the promise to get more people into work. Investment has almost returned to pre-crisis levels and the state of public finances in terms of debt and deficit levels has improved significantly.

The gross domestic product of the euro area and the wider EU were both expected to increase by 2.1 % in 2018, with every country in the EU expected to see its economy grow.

More Europeans were in work than ever before, with 12.4

million new jobs created since 2014, unemployment dropping to 6.8 %, and youth unemployment back to its 2008 level. The Investment Plan for Europe has mobilised over €370 billion in investment across Europe since 2015, significantly more than targeted. As a result, the European Fund for Strategic Investments is expected to support an estimated 1.4 million new jobs by 2020 while the EU's gross domestic product will be boosted by an estimated 1.3 %.

Household incomes continued to rise while public debt levels fell. In 2018 government deficits in the EU were expected to fall to 0.6 % of gross domestic product, down from 6.2 % in 2009, and the ratio of government debt to gross domestic product was expected to fall to 81.4 %

from 88.3 % in 2014. Inflation is steady at 1.7 %.

In 2018 European banks continued to get stronger, less encumbered by bad loans, and better prepared to withstand potential economic shocks.

However, despite all these positive developments, it needs to be underlined that the outlook for the global economy has deteriorated amidst trade tensions and geopolitical uncertainties, and the risks to the European economy have increased.

## THE EU IN 2018 PRIORITY 2

2018 was another successful year for Europe's Digital Single Market Strategy, which is well on its way.

In 2018 agreement was reached on 23 legislative proposals and seven are still under negotiation. The Commission proposed new initiatives on supercomputing, ehealth, disinformation, public sector information, the transparency of online platforms, artificial intelligence and blockchain. The Commission also proposed investment in digital transformation and new measures to support media freedom, pluralism and literacy.

In September President Juncker announced proposals

to strengthen the EU's cybersecurity capabilities and in December, an agreement was reached on the Cybersecurity Act proposed by the Commission in 2017. This reinforces the mandate of the EU Agency for Cybersecurity and establishes an EU framework for cybersecurity certification, boosting the security of online services and consumer devices.

Progress was made on legislation to facilitate access to content online and e-commerce and on proposals to modernise EU copyright rules, e-privacy and digital contracts, giving consumers and businesses clear rights. Measures covering audiovisual

media services, free flow of data and the Single Digital Gateway were agreed. In December the new European Electronic Communications Code entered into force, providing an updated regulatory framework for electronic communications to encourage investment in very high-capacity networks and protect users in the digital age.

Since 1 April 2018, Europeans have been able to access the online content they subscribe to at home, wherever they are in the EU, and their personal data is protected by the new General Data Protection Regulation which came into effect in May.

The EU continued to fight anti-competitive behaviour in the digital field, fining Qualcomm for abusing its market dominance in certain chipsets and Google for illegal practices related to the Android operating system.

To ensure a continuously stronger Digital Single Market and to keep the EU at the forefront of digital transformation, the Commission proposed a new €9.2 billion Digital Europe Programme as part of the EU's next long-term budget.



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## A connected Digital Single Market

**'I believe that we must make much better use of the great opportunities offered by digital technologies, which know no borders.'**

*Jean-Claude Juncker, political guidelines, 15 July 2014*

## THE EU IN 2018 PRIORITY 3

'I want to reform and reorganise Europe's energy policy into a new European Energy Union ... We need to strengthen the share of renewable energies on our continent ... A binding 30 % objective for energy efficiency by 2030 is to me the minimum if we want to be credible and forward-looking ... This is not only a matter of a responsible climate change policy. It is, at the same time, an industrial policy imperative.'

*Jean-Claude Juncker, political guidelines, 15 July 2014*

© Fotolia



# A resilient Energy Union with a forward-looking climate change policy

The EU's vision to create a European Energy Union and place Europe at the forefront of energy efficiency, clean and renewable energy production and the fight against climate change is becoming a reality. EU climate and energy policies are accelerating public and private investment in innovation and modernisation, creating green jobs, and enabling all citizens to benefit from the transition to a modern and clean economy.

The EU has shown that the world can count on Europe for climate leadership. It is the first major economy to translate its promises under the Paris Agreement on climate change into binding laws. At the UN Climate Conference in Katowice in December, the EU played an instrumental role in making the Paris Agreement operational, with the adoption

of a clear rulebook that will turn it into climate action at all levels worldwide.

With the Commission presenting its vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate-neutral economy by 2050, the EU further demonstrated its commitment to ambitious climate action that goes hand in hand with economic modernisation and a better quality of life.

In 2018 the EU continued to take action to meet its commitments. It set ambitious new renewable energy and energy efficiency targets, while new rules and sources of investment came into force to make buildings more energy efficient. A robust governance system based on national energy and climate plans was agreed, as well as new rules

for making the EU's electricity market work better. All this will underpin the Energy Union and ensure its objectives are achieved.

Good progress was made on strong rules to decarbonise and modernise the transport sector, while the agreement on synchronising the Baltic States' electricity grid with the continental European network is a major milestone in creating a more connected and better integrated EU energy market.

## THE EU IN 2018 PRIORITY 4

In 2018 we celebrated 25 years of the internal market, also known as the Single Market. It is one of the largest markets in the world, where people, goods, services and money can move freely.

Thanks to the Single Market, Europeans can in principle buy what they want, where they want and benefit from greater choice and lower prices. European businesses — big and small — can expand their customer base and trade products and services more easily across the EU.

Citizens have seen the end of roaming charges, gained a full set of passenger rights and enjoy greater consumer

protection on and offline. We live in a fairer and more social Europe where people can expect better living and working standards. However, more remains to be done in this area.

Efforts to improve the functioning of the Single Market continue on a daily basis — from creating a Single EU Value Added Tax area and combating tax evasion and fraud to ensuring the cars we drive are safer and cleaner.

Developments in 2018 include important milestones towards a fair internal market with the adoption of new rules on equal pay for equal work in the same place and to ensure

professionals can provide their services across the Union more easily. The EU also agreed to create a Single Digital Gateway to make it easier for citizens and businesses to manage their paperwork online.

The Customs Union, which celebrated its 50th anniversary in July, continues to be a cornerstone of the Single Market. It keeps EU borders safe and protects citizens from prohibited and dangerous goods while safeguarding the financial interests of the EU and supporting a smooth flow of legitimate trade.



**‘Our internal market is Europe’s best asset in times of increasing globalisation. I therefore want the next Commission to build on the strength of our Single Market and to fully exploit its potential in all its dimensions.’**

*Jean-Claude Juncker, political guidelines, 15 July 2014*

# A deeper and fairer internal market with a strengthened industrial base

## THE EU IN 2018 PRIORITY 5

On 1 January 2019 Europe celebrated the 20th anniversary of the euro. Since its launch, the euro has been the second most used reserve currency in the world. Today, 60 countries link their currencies to the euro in one way or another. And soon the euro area will represent 85 % of the overall gross domestic product of the entire European Union.

Despite the difficulties of recent years, public support for the euro and Economic and Monetary Union in Europe remains at a record high.

The EU has taken important steps towards a deeper and fairer Economic and Monetary

Union and towards completed Banking and Capital Markets Unions.

Financial stability has been considerably reinforced in the euro area and throughout the EU since the outbreak of the financial crises. Today, banks are much better capitalised. The ratio of non-performing loans has almost halved since 2014 and are approaching pre-crisis levels. Still, to harness the full potential of the euro, more needs to be done.

At the Euro Summit in December, EU leaders took further steps to deepen the Economic and Monetary Union by backing plans for a common backstop to the Single

Resolution Fund, endorsing reform of the European Stability Mechanism. They also called for the development of a budgetary instrument to support economic convergence and competitiveness in the euro area and future euro area Member States, based on the proposals made by the Commission in the context of the next long-term budget.

Also in December, the Commission presented ideas for the strengthening of the international role of the euro in an increasingly complex and multi-polar world and to better reflect Europe's economic, political and financial weight.



**‘Over the next five years, I want to continue with the reform of our Economic and Monetary Union to preserve the stability of our single currency and to enhance the convergence of economic, fiscal and labour market policies between the Member States that share the single currency.’**

*Jean-Claude Juncker, political guidelines, 15 July 2014*

# A deeper and fairer Economic and Monetary Union

## THE EU IN 2018 PRIORITY 6

'European trade policy means making the most of opportunities with like-minded partners across the world. It also means working to improve and shape the global rules-based system so that it continues to deliver peace, prosperity and progress.'

*Jean-Claude Juncker, Keynote speech 'Transatlantic relations at a crossroads', 25 July 2018*

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# A balanced and progressive trade policy to harness globalisation

The EU reaffirmed its position as a trade power in 2018, continuing to be one of the world's most open economies and pursuing an ambitious trade negotiations agenda which aims to open markets and create a level playing field for EU firms around the globe. The EU has concluded trade agreements with 71 countries around the world, accounting for 40 % of the world's gross domestic product. The European economy depends on trade: every €1 billion in exports supports 14 000 jobs in Europe. Openness combined with high standards remains the best way to make globalisation work for all Europeans.

With 36 million EU jobs depending on exports, 80 % of imports used as input for EU goods or services, and 90 % of global growth in the coming

decades expected to come from outside the EU, open trade is more important than ever for the EU.

The EU is committed to a rules-based multilateral trading system as the basis for prosperity. It continues to play a leading role in the World Trade Organization and has proposed ideas for reforming it. When others break international trade rules or engage in unfair trading practices, the EU defends European businesses, workers and citizens.

In 2018, the EU defended its interests in the face of protectionist tendencies and growing barriers to trade. Stronger and more effective trade defence rules came into force. The EU also began the process of setting up a new framework for screening

strategic investments from outside the EU.

The EU reached a new agreement on trade with Mexico, signed a trade deal with Japan, and continued talks with Mercosur. The EU also made good progress in other trade negotiations, including with Chile, and launched talks for trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand.

## THE EU IN 2018 PRIORITY 7

The remaining foundations of the Security Union were laid in 2018 with a new set of proposals to deny terrorists and criminals the means to commit their crimes. This included measures to facilitate cross-border access to electronic evidence and access to financial information for law-enforcement authorities, measures to prevent document fraud and the use of false identities, and new rules on the freezing and confiscation of criminal assets. The EU also stepped up the fight against terrorism and terrorist content online.

In May a new era in data protection dawned across the EU with new rules

providing a stronger and more consistent personal data protection framework for people, businesses and administrations.

The EU continued to work to improve the effectiveness of national justice systems and to promote and uphold the respect of the rule of law. To further strengthen fundamental rights, the Commission proposed EU-wide standards for the protection of whistleblowers, strengthened equality bodies, and also worked on the Gender Pay Gap Action Plan and the European Disability Strategy.

In September 2018 the Commission adopted a package

of measures to help ensure free, fair and secure elections, as part of the preparations for the European elections in 2019. A preliminary agreement was expected between Parliament and Council in January 2019.

The Commission adopted a New Deal for Consumers, thereby strengthening consumer rights, in the digital sphere and a European system of collective redress when groups of consumers have suffered harm.



**An area of justice  
and fundamental  
rights based on  
mutual trust**

**‘Our European Union is more than a big common market. It is also a Union of shared values, which are spelled out in the Treaties and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Citizens expect their governments to provide justice, protection and fairness with full respect for fundamental rights and the rule of law. This also requires joint European action, based on our shared values.’**

*Jean-Claude Juncker, political guidelines, 15 July 2014*



## Towards a new policy on migration

In 2018, the European Union's comprehensive approach on migration continued to deliver on all fronts: deeper cooperation with partner countries; better-managed external borders; and more effective and operational tools to protect our borders and manage migration inside the European Union in a spirit of solidarity and responsibility. Work on the European Agenda on Migration made a positive contribution to replacing unsafe and uncontrolled migration with safe, orderly and regular migration. Following the peak in arrivals to the European Union in 2015, flows are now back to below pre-crisis levels.

The Commission presented new proposals in September to further strengthen the European Border and Coast Guard with a standing corps

of 10 000 operational staff; to establish a stronger mandate for an EU Agency for Asylum so that, together, they are able to deploy joint EU migration management teams in all situations and offer full operational support to Member States. Also in September, the Commission proposed a targeted revision of the Return Directive to put in place more effective and simplified return procedures.

Following 2 years of intense work, five of seven proposals to improve our current asylum system have come close to adoption in 2018. Legal migration channels to the European Union increased for people in need of international protection, and since 2015, resettlement programmes have offered safe and legal pathways to almost 44 000 people.

**'We cannot continue to squabble to find ad-hoc solutions each time a new ship arrives. Temporary solidarity is not good enough. We need lasting solidarity — today and forever more.'**

*Jean-Claude Juncker, State of the Union address, 12 September 2018*

In its December progress report on the European Agenda on Migration, the Commission reiterated its recommendation to step up efforts to better manage labour migration, based on the needs of our economies.

## THE EU IN 2018 PRIORITY 9

**'I want our Union to become a stronger global actor ... and I want us to dedicate further efforts to defence matters.'**

*Jean-Claude Juncker, State of the Union address, 13 September 2017*

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## A stronger global actor

As the global situation becomes less stable, and the role of international institutions continues to come under scrutiny, the EU is using its diplomatic, political, and economic power as a security provider to promote international peace and security.

The EU firmly believes that multilateral diplomacy leads to peaceful solutions to pressing international issues. The EU has shown leadership, creativity and reliability in supporting the Iran nuclear deal, the Paris climate change agreement, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, new trade agreements with strong social safeguards and cooperation with the African Union and working with the United Nations. The EU also remained the largest provider of official development assistance in 2018.

Our neighbourhood and enlargement policies supported stability and focused on building closer relations between the European Union and its neighbours.

European security and defence was a priority in 2018 with the EU taking decisive steps to increase its role as a global security provider to complement its economic power. The proposed expansion of the European Defence Fund is an example of this, as is the adoption of 34 defence projects in the framework of the Permanent Structured Cooperation, and a new European Peace Facility for defence cooperation between countries.

In 2018 the EU consolidated its position as the world's biggest donor of humanitarian aid, giving over €1 billion. The EU's

humanitarian aid worldwide provided life-saving support from natural disasters and man-made conflicts around the globe.

## THE EU IN 2018 PRIORITY 10

In his 2014 political guidelines for the next European Commission, Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker committed to 'work to re-gain citizens' trust in the European project'. To fulfil this aim, the Juncker Commission has worked since day one to make the EU more democratic, by opening up the policymaking process to citizens' input, boosting transparency and embedding Better Regulation principles at the heart of the Commission's work.

2018 continued to build on previous achievements by presenting new future-oriented initiatives. In February, the Commission presented practical measures to EU leaders to improve the connection to citizens at the next European elections and make the EU work more efficiently. Citizens' Dialogues went from strength to strength, with the 1 000th Dialogue taking place in

**'A European Commission under my leadership will be committed to filling the special partnership with the European Parliament with new life. I am also committed to enhanced transparency when it comes to contact with stakeholders and lobbyists.'**

*Jean-Claude Juncker, political guidelines, 15 July 2014*

Freiburg, Germany, in October with President Juncker, and wide-ranging debates on the future of Europe.

Many of these Citizens' Dialogues discussed the future of Europe, a debate that gathered pace in 2018 with discussions online and in parliaments, cities and regions across the Union in the run-up to the decisions that the Union is expected to take at the Sibiu Summit in May 2019.

The Commission gave its views on the selection process for the next Commission President, the composition of the future European Parliament and Commission and the functioning of a double-hatted

President for the Commission and European Council.

The European Parliament and the Council reached agreement in February on new rules for funding European political parties and in December on the reform of the European Citizens' Initiative, which includes more information and help for organisers, making it easier for citizens to prepare an initiative. And in May the Commission presented its proposal for the future long-term budget of the Union, launching a process with the other European institutions to ensure that the EU will have the resources to meet the Union's ambitions and face current and future challenges.



# A Union of democratic change

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# The European Union



