

## Be the difference this May

Next month more than 100 local parties are facing council elections. If yours isn't one of them, you can still make a huge difference **to the party's overall local election effort – and help us elect more Liberal Democrats in May.**

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## The EU pledges €77 million for the DRC crisis at Geneva donors' conference

On this occasion, Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos **Stylianides** reiterated the EU's support in response to the worsening humanitarian situation in the region, with contributions worth €77 million in emergency and development assistance to the DRC crisis.

*"Today, we stand united with the people of the DRC. For too long have humanitarian needs persisted in the country, and the situation keeps worsening. We are determined to assist the most vulnerable people of the DRC and give them hope. In order to fulfil our humanitarian mission and save lives on the ground, we need unhindered and continuous humanitarian access to all regions, as well as protection for humanitarian workers," said Commissioner **Stylianides**.*

The Commissioner paid an [official visit to the DRC](#) on 24-26 March 2018, where he visited EU-funded aid projects in North and South Kivu and met with government officials in Kinshasa. From today's pledge, €49.5 million – which were announced by Commissioner **Stylianides** during his recent visit in the DRC – will address the deteriorating humanitarian crisis in the DRC and finance humanitarian flight services to the most remote areas of the country. Another €27.6 million will address health, food security, education, and resilience building in the DRC. Beyond the pledged amount, the European Union also allocated €6 million to support DRC refugees and hosting communities in neighbouring Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda.

### **Background**

The European Union is co-hosting the [DRC Humanitarian Conference in Geneva](#), together with the United Nations' Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Kingdom of the Netherlands, to mobilise resources to respond to the humanitarian crisis in the DRC.

Humanitarian needs in the DRC have doubled over the last year, with over 16 million people being affected by the crisis and 13 million in need of humanitarian assistance throughout the country. More than 5 million people are currently displaced, which include 4.5 million internally displaced and approximately 630,000 who have fled to neighbouring countries.

Humanitarian operations funded through the Commission's Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations focus on helping people affected by recent or ongoing violence, acute malnutrition, and epidemics by providing them with protection and life-saving assistance in a timely manner. Additionally, the Commission runs its own humanitarian air service, ECHO Flight, which offers humanitarian partner organisations safe and free transport to remote areas in the country.

In addition to humanitarian activities, the Commission has also stepped up its development cooperation support in sectors of health and food security, to respond to the urgent needs of the population and most vulnerable people in the Kasai region, while new support has been approved to address childrens' education needs in conflict environment regions in Kivu and Tanganyika.

**For more information**

[Factsheet – Democratic Republic of Congo](#)

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## **Indicative programme – Foreign Affairs Council of 16 April 2018**

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## Daily News 13 / 04 / 2018

### **€65 million of EU financing for 430 social enterprises in the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain and France**

The European Investment Fund (EIF) and Triodos Bank have signed the first Social Entrepreneurship guarantee agreement in The Netherlands under the [EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation](#) (EaSI). This new financing agreement was made possible by the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), the core of the [Investment Plan for Europe](#). This new guarantee agreement allows Triodos Bank to provide a total of €65 million to 430 social entrepreneurs over the next 5 years in the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain and France. Social entrepreneurs will be able to benefit from loans at a reduced interest rate with lower collateral requirements under the EU supported programme. Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne Thyssen, said: *"Thanks to EU funding, Triodos Bank will launch a new lending activity worth €65 million to support 430 social entrepreneurs, many of whom face difficulties in accessing credit from traditional banking sources. This new guarantee agreement will allow social entrepreneurs from the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain and France, working in sectors such as the organic food supply chain, sustainable fashion and labour inclusion, to benefit from loans at a reduced interest rate to start-up or develop their businesses. The Commission remains committed to foster sustainable employment for the most vulnerable people in the labour market."* The EaSI Guarantee scheme was launched in June 2015 and is funded by the European Commission and managed by the European Investment Fund. More information is available in this [press release](#). (For more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: +32 229 67094)

### **Investment Plan: €24 million for new medical centre at Medical University of Warsaw**

The Medical University of Warsaw is receiving a PLN 100 million (€24 million) loan from the European Investment Bank (EIB) to modernise key elements of its main Warsaw campus. The project consists of the design, construction and implementation of a state-of-the-art new medical simulations centre on the university's main campus in Warsaw that will be used for training and research. The loan is guaranteed under the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), which is the financial pillar of the Juncker Plan. The project also received technical assistance from the European Investment Advisory Hub (EIAH). Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Tibor Navracsics, said: *"We need to invest more in education. This is crucial*

to build resilient, cohesive, fair societies, and to ensure that the European economy remains competitive and innovative. I am therefore pleased to see the European Investment Bank and the Medical University of Warsaw join forces, backed by the Investment Plan for Europe, to improve teaching and learning facilities for students and staff." (Full press release is found [here](#). For all the latest EFSI results see the [Investment Plan website](#) or contact Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Siobhán Millbright – Tel.: +32 229 57361)

## **100 organisations helping to upgrade digital skills of European citizens**

Since the launch of the [Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition](#) in December 2016, a first 100 European organisations, among them governments and businesses, have provided over 3.7 million IT training sessions, more than one million certifications for improved digital skills and 9,000 job placements and internship offers in the digital sector. The number of active organisations is expected to increase rapidly, as the Coalition now has more than [360 members](#) from all sectors of the economy who have pledged to reduce the digital skills gap. Tibor Navracsics, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, said: "*Europe's education and training systems need to give people from all backgrounds the right digital skills to progress professionally, but also to enable them to find their place in society as engaged citizens. This needs to involve partners from all sides. That is why the Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition is important in enabling Europeans to prosper in increasingly digital societies.*" Mariya Gabriel, Commissioner for the Digital Economy and Society, said: "*The Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition is a collective effort to tackle one of Europe's biggest challenges: filling IT vacancies. 100 concrete commitments in just over a year is a sign of the support from stakeholders across Europe who recognise the importance of digital skills for all, no matter the age, gender or job profile.*" The majority of pledges aim either to bring more digital skills into education by transforming teaching methods or to offer trainings to upskill the European workforce. Trainings include basic digital skills and coding, as well as specialised skills such as data analytics and cybersecurity. In order to boost digital skills of young people and to help ensure that education systems make the most of new technologies, the European Commission launched the [Digital Education Action Plan](#) beginning of this year. Further details are available [here](#). (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 56172; Inga Höglund Tel.: +32 229 55040)

## **State aid: Commission approves Italian scheme facilitating the market exit of failing small banks**

The European Commission has authorised under EU State aid rules an Italian liquidation scheme for small banks with total assets of less than €3 billion. The scheme facilitates the work of the Italian authorities in case of urgent need for action, such as when a bank is found to be failing by the competent national authorities. Under the scheme, the recognised deposit guarantee schemes (DGS) in Italy can support the transfer of a failing bank's assets and liabilities to another bank under national insolvency proceedings. The Commission found such support by the mandatory arms of the Italian DGS to be compatible state aid, in line with the [Commission's 2013 Banking](#)

[Communication](#) and related EU law, including the [EU Directive on Deposit Guarantee Schemes](#), in particular Article 11(6). Any aid would be limited to the minimum necessary to enable an orderly exit of a failing bank from the market. Therefore, contributions from shareholders and subordinated debt holders will be required in line with the 2013 Banking Communication requirements. The DGS funds would be used to preserve the access of depositors to covered deposits, and the funding costs would not exceed the net amount needed to compensate covered depositors at the failing bank. The authorisation of aid under the scheme is granted for twelve months from today. The Banking Communication sets out a number of conditions under which Member States have the possibility to set up schemes to support the orderly exit of small failing banks, adapted to the conditions in each market. The Commission has already approved such schemes for Croatia, Denmark, Ireland and Poland. The non-confidential version of the decision will be made available under the case number SA.50640 in the [State Aid Register](#) on the [DG Competition](#) website once any confidentiality issues have been resolved. (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Sarantopoulou – Tel.: +32 229 13740; Yizhou Ren – Tel.: +32 229 94889)

### **Mergers: Commission clears the acquisition of Cunningham Lindsey by Sedgwick**

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of sole control over Cunningham Lindsey by Sedgwick, both based in the US. Cunningham Lindsey is a global provider of insurance-related services to insurers and reinsurance companies, insurance brokers, insurance syndicates, major self-insured corporations, and government authorities. Sedgwick, currently indirectly solely controlled by private equity fund KKR (USA), is a global provider of risk management solutions. Sedgwick (trading as Vericclaim) and Cunningham Lindsey are both active in claims management and in inspection services related to claims management ("loss adjusting services") in the United Kingdom and Ireland. After its market investigation, the Commission concluded that the proposed transaction would raise no competition concerns, in particular in view of the alternative suppliers that will remain on these markets. More information is available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the public [case register](#) under the case number M.[8764](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Sarantopoulou – Tel.: +32 229 13740)

### **Eurobarometer on integration: Majority of Europeans believe that integration measures are a necessary investment in the long-run**

According to a [Eurobarometer survey](#) published today, 69% of Europeans believe that integration measures are a necessary investment in the long-run and a similar proportion view integration as a two-way process for both migrants and host societies. Europeans tend to agree on the main factors that may facilitate or prevent integration as well as on policy measures that support it, such as offering language courses upon arrival, mandatory integration programmes and measures facilitating access to the labour market. According to the survey, around 60% of respondents interact daily with migrants, while 40% have either friends or family members who are migrants. A majority of respondents in all Member States say that the EU plays an important role when it comes to integration, with a particular added value for sharing best

practices, promoting cooperation between all actors involved, and financial support. At the same time, the survey finds that only a minority of Europeans think they are well informed about migration and integration. Europeans also tend to overestimate the number of non-EU migrants in their countries: In 19 Member States, the actual proportion of non-EU migrants is half or less than half of their estimated share. You can find the full survey [here](#). (For more information: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 2 296 74 56; Tove Ernst – Tel.: +32 229 86764; Markus Lammert – Tel.: +32 229 80423)

## L'UE s'engage à hauteur de 77 millions d'euros pour la crise en République démocratique du Congo lors de la conférence des donateurs à Genève

L'Union européenne a coorganisé aujourd'hui à Genève la [conférence humanitaire sur la République démocratique du Congo](#) (RDC) au cours de laquelle le commissaire européen chargé de l'aide humanitaire et de la gestion des crises, **Christos Stylianides**, a réitéré le soutien de l'UE en réponse à l'aggravation de la situation humanitaire dans la région, au moyen de contributions d'un montant de 77 millions d'euros d'aide d'urgence et au développement pour la crise en RDC. «*Aujourd'hui, nous sommes unis avec la population de RDC. Les besoins humanitaires persistent depuis trop longtemps dans le pays, et la situation continue de s'aggraver. Nous sommes déterminés à aider les populations les plus vulnérables de RDC et à leur donner de l'espoir. Pour remplir notre mission humanitaire et sauver des vies sur le terrain, nous avons besoin d'un accès humanitaire continu et sans entrave à toutes les régions, ainsi que d'une protection des travailleurs humanitaires*», a affirmé le commissaire **Stylianides**. Sur le montant annoncé aujourd'hui, 49,5 millions d'euros – qui ont été annoncés par le commissaire **Stylianides** au cours de sa [récente visite en RDC](#) – seront destinés à faire face à l'aggravation de la crise humanitaire en RDC et à financer les services de vols humanitaires vers les zones les plus reculées du pays. 27,6 millions d'euros seront également consacrés à la santé, la sécurité alimentaire, l'éducation et au renforcement de la résilience en RDC. En plus du montant promis, l'Union européenne a également affecté 6 millions d'euros au soutien des réfugiés de RDC et des populations d'accueil dans les pays voisins que sont le Burundi, le Rwanda, la Tanzanie et l'Ouganda. Le communiqué de presse complet est disponible [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Maja Kocijancic – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Christina Wunder – Tel.: +32 229 92256)

## Eurostat: Euro area international trade in goods surplus €18.9 billion

The first estimate for euro area (EA19) exports of goods to the rest of the world in February 2018 was €177.5 billion, an increase of 3.0% compared with February 2017 (€172.3 billion). Imports from the rest of the world stood at €158.6 billion, a rise of 1.5% compared with February 2017 (€156.2 billion). As a result, the euro area recorded a €18.9 billion surplus in trade in goods with the rest of the world in February 2018, compared with +€16.1 billion in February 2017. Intra-euro area trade rose to €153.7 billion in February 2018, up by 3.9% compared with February 2017. A Eurostat press release is available [here](#). (For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel.: +32 229 56185; Kinga Malinowska – Tel.: +32 229 51383)

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### High Representative/Vice-President Mogherini travels to Dhahran, Saudi Arabia for the 29<sup>th</sup> League of Arab States Summit

On 15 April, High Representative/Vice-President Federica **Mogherini** will travel to Dhahran (Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia), where she has been invited to address the opening of the 29<sup>th</sup> League of Arab States (LAS) Summit. It is the second time High Representative/Vice-President **Mogherini** is invited to attend a LAS summit, after last year's gathering in Jordan. The summit will be the opportunity for the High Representative/Vice-President to discuss with leaders of the Arab States and members of the international community the latest developments in the region and the challenges to its stability. The European Union and the League of Arab States have a strong relationship based on growing political dialogue and cooperation. The invitation to the High Representative/Vice-President **Mogherini** illustrates the willingness of the two organisations to further strengthen their bonds. In the margins of the Summit, High Representative/Vice-President **Mogherini** will also have a number of bilateral meetings. Audio-visual coverage will be available on [EbS](#). (For more information: Maja Kocijančič – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Lauranne Devillé – Tel.: +32 229 80833)

### Vice-President Šefčovič in Germany for second Energy Union Tour

Commission Vice-President for Energy Union Maroš **Šefčovič** will be in Germany on 16-17 April for the second [Energy Union Tour](#). He will meet Federal Economy Minister Peter Altmaier (CDU), Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs Heiko Maas (SPD), and Cem Özdemir (Green Party), Chair of the Transport Committee of the Bundestag. Their discussions will focus on Germany's progress towards Energy Union targets, the '[Clean Energy for All Europeans](#)' legislative package and the post-2020 national energy and climate strategy, and the possibility of using EU funding to invest in projects that will contribute to the clean energy transition. Vice-President **Šefčovič** will participate in an energy dialogue in the Bundestag, the German Parliament, and hold exchanges with members of its Committee for Economic Affairs and Energy. He will then give a keynote speech at the Berlin Energy Transition Dialogue, as well as participate in the Global Summit on Blockchain Technology in the Energy Sector. Ahead of his visit, Vice-President **Šefčovič** said: "*I am impressed that Germany is already close to achieving its 2020 renewables target. However, it will need to do more to meet its emissions reduction objective. As for energy efficiency, good efforts are underway, and the EU is investing €1.3 billion in energy efficiency improvements in the country. Furthermore, German energy infrastructure projects have already benefited from the European Fund for Strategic Investments, but there is potential for more, and I also encourage project promoters to make full use of the EU's European Investment Advisory Hub and European Investment Project Portal.*" (For more information: Anca Paduraru – Tel.: +32 229 91269; Nicole Bockstaller – Tel.: +32 229 52589)

### Commissioner Gabriel in Switzerland to discuss digital investments and

## **development at the UN eCommerce Week**

On Monday, Commissioner **Gabriel** will attend “eCommerce Week” organised by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in Geneva to talk about investment in digital technologies as a tool for economic growth and development. At 12:00 CET, she will deliver a keynote speech at Digital Economy for Development panel, highlighting the progress of the [Digital Single Market](#) in Europe as well as the necessity to aid others with their digital transformation. Later in the afternoon, Commissioner **Gabriel** will meet with Amani Abou-Zeid, Commissioner for Infrastructure and Energy of the African Union Commission, and Isabelle Durant, Secretary-General of United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, to speak about facilitating digital trade with the African continent. Afterwards, the Commissioner will attend a bilateral meeting with Derek O’Halloran, Head of the Digital Economy and Society of the World Economic Forum to discuss potential cooperation on digital economy issues. (For more information: *Nathalie Vandystadt* – Tel.: +32 229 56172; *Inga Höglund* Tel.: +32 229 55040)

## **Vice-President Dombrovskis in Germany to discuss the future of the Economic and Monetary Union**

Valdis **Dombrovskis**, Vice-President for the Euro and Social Dialogue, also in charge of Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, is in Berlin today to meet the Federal Minister for Finance, Olaf Scholz, and the Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Energy, Peter Altmaier. They will discuss the future and deepening of the European Economic and Monetary Union and the European Semester, EU’s cycle of economic policy coordination. (For more information: *Johannes Bahrke* – Tel.: +32 229 58615; *Anniky Lamp* – Tel.: +32 229 56151; *Letizia Lupini* – Tel.: +32 229 51958)

## [Calendar](#)

The Commissioners’ weekly activities

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

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**Vote for someone who'll get things done for your community on 3rd May**

**There is a secret phenomenon in British politics.**

It is occurring in by-elections all over the country, week in, week out, to

local authorities from Sunderland to Somerset. Against the Tories. Against Labour. In Leave areas. In Remain areas.

**Since the general election in 2017, the Liberal Democrats are up 15 seats**, double Labour's increase of 7, while the Conservatives are tanking – they have lost 18 seats.

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