

The pound's value

There is a lot of disinformation about rises and falls in the pound. Some would have you believe we had a stable and strong pound prior to the Brexit vote, and then it fell. The truth is somewhat different.

The crucial cross rate is the Euro rate, given the volume of imports we take from the EU. Sterling fell a lot during the banking crash of the last decade. On 3rd January 2009 it fell as low as Euro 1.04. It rallied in the next decade, typically trading around Euro 1.20 in the period 2010-2014. It hit a low of Euro 1.16 in February and August 2013.

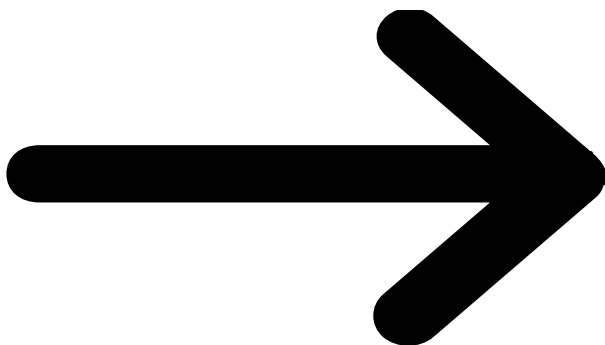
By June 14 2016, just before the vote, it was around Euro 1.25, having been higher in previous months. Today it is at Euro 1.18, just 5% down on the June pre vote low. At today's level, after rallying in recent weeks, it is around its average earlier this decade.

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The Scottish Conservatives have accused Nicola Sturgeon of “playing political games” with Brexit.

The SNP leader said she wanted the Scottish Government to be “at the top table in Brexit negotiations.”

At the same time, she said she wanted to strengthen her hand as she seeks to impose a second, unwanted independence referendum on Scotland.

Scottish Conservative deputy leader Jackson Carlaw said:

“The only conclusion to be reached from this is that Nicola Sturgeon has now gone entirely through the looking glass.

“Let’s be clear about what she says she now wants.

“She says she wants to decide how Brexit is designed for the whole of the UK – even though SNP Ministers want that deal to fail.

“At the same time, she also wants to impose an independence referendum campaign on Scotland to try and split the UK in two.

“It is a ridiculous position to take.

“The SNP is in a complete shambles on independence and Europe, and the cracks are now beginning to show.

“Nicola Sturgeon should stop the political games, drop her plan for an unwanted second referendum and seek to make Brexit work for all of us.

“If re-elected, a Conservative UK Government will get on with the job of delivering the best Brexit deal for all of us in the UK, including Scotland.”

Giving evidence to a Holyrood committee last week, Nicola Sturgeon’s Brexit minister, Michael Russell, predicted talks to leave the EU would fail, paving the way for independence.

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A former Liberal Democrat councillor in Scotland's capital city has backed the Conservatives, adding "something of a revolution" is building under leader Ruth Davidson.

Alastair Shields, who represented the Lib Dems in Edinburgh's Almond ward last term, said he would now campaign for the Scottish Conservatives in Edinburgh West.

He said the party was "ticking both boxes" when it came to respecting the results of the independence and EU referendums, and "fighting hardest for the centre ground".

Mr Shields is the latest former Labour or Liberal Democrat member to switch to the Scottish Conservatives ahead of next month's election.

Pledging to get his "canvassing shoes on", he said:

"In Edinburgh West, the Scottish Conservatives appeal to the electorate because they spend more time talking about their own campaign pledges and the potential of their candidates.

"They put across a simple message: we will deliver, vote for us.

"It feels like something of a revolution is developing in Scotland. Ruth Davidson puts people and communities at the top of the agenda, leaving talk of independence behind. We've had that discussion and the Scottish people rejected it. Let's move on."

Scottish Conservative Edinburgh West candidate Sandy Batho said:

"Alastair is one of many former Labour and Lib Dem members switching their support to the Scottish Conservatives.

"That's because people want to see a party which will fight the SNP in standing up for Scotland's place in the UK, and respect last year's Brexit vote too.

"All over the country the party is making strides, and it's abundantly clear we are the only ones capable of standing up to the SNP and its divisive drive for another independence referendum."

Below are Mr Shields' remarks in full:

"For me, this election is mostly about which party is fighting hardest for the centre ground and upholding democracy at a time where it constantly appears to be challenged. Right now, the Conservatives are ticking both of these boxes leaps and bounds above the others."

"I'm not a Brexiteer, I voted Remain. I don't think anyone in the country is

under any doubt the process will be tough in the years ahead and so much is still unknown. But I appreciate that leaving the EU was the greater choice of the British people and that must be respected. I accept Brexit and believe the Conservatives, under the leadership of Theresa May, stand to represent many people across the country with the same mindset."

"In Edinburgh West, the Scottish Conservatives appeal to the electorate because they spend more time talking about their own campaign pledges and the potential of their candidates. They put across a simple message: We will deliver, vote for us."

"I am looking forward to getting my canvassing shoes on for the Conservatives during this campaign. I last helped them as a student and it feels like something of a revolution is developing in Scotland."

[EU strengthens humanitarian support for Myanmar/Burma, calls for greater aid access](#)

As the first Commissioner to visit Northern Rakhine State, he called for greater access for aid organisations working in the area and visited several EU funded humanitarian projects.

"The European Union is committed to supporting those in need in Myanmar/Burma. The recent violence in Northern Rakhine State has created pressing humanitarian needs. During my visit I saw that malnutrition rates have deteriorated after the recent crisis. Our humanitarian partners are helping government authorities develop a food security and nutrition strategy for this region, but we still need better humanitarian access in order to facilitate a quick and full response by aid agencies to assist all affected communities. It is particularly important to help Rohingya civilians who have suffered involuntary displacements as well as supporting their livelihoods." said Commissioner **Stylianides**.

More than half a million people in Myanmar need humanitarian assistance, including almost 220 000 who are living in displacement. Over €9 million of the new EU funding will provide direct humanitarian assistance to communities living in conflict-afflicted areas (including Rakhine, Shan, and Kachin States), while another €3 million will fund disaster-risk-reduction activities to strengthen the resilience of communities at risk of natural disasters.

Since 1994, the European Commission has provided €229 million in humanitarian aid to Myanmar/Burma.

Both photo and video coverage of the visit is available on [EbS](#).

Background

The visit follows the meeting on 2nd May in Brussels of High Representative / Vice-President Federica **Mogherini** and Commissioner **Stylianides** with State Counsellor and Foreign Minister, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

In early October 2016, a deadly assault on three border guard posts in Northern Rakhine State triggered military operations which resulted in the suspension of humanitarian activities in the region. To date, more than 130 000 people who were dependant on aid remain without much-needed regular assistance.

In this region, an estimated 800 000 Rohingya people are deprived of their basic rights, and restrictions of movement seriously impact their livelihood and access to basic services. Both in the Northern Rakhine and Kachin States, humanitarian access remains a problem.

Since 1994, the European Commission's humanitarian aid department has provided €145 million in relief assistance for victims of conflict, communal violence and epidemics, while €84 million has reached victims of natural disasters and to support Disaster Risk Reduction and Preparedness programs in the country. EU aid is channelled impartially to the affected populations, regardless of their race, ethnic group, religion, gender, age, nationality or political affiliation.

For more information

[Factsheet on Myanmar](#)

[Factsheet on the Rohingya crisis](#)

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EU announces 21 May as 'European Natura 2000 day'

[Today](#), Commissioner Karmenu **Vella**, Adina-Ioana Valean, Chairwoman of the European Parliament's Environment Committee, Karl-Heinz Lambertz, First Vice-President of the Committee of the Regions and Neil Kerr, Deputy Permanent Representative of Malta signed a [joint declaration](#) proclaiming 21 May as the [European Natura 2000 Day](#). Commissioner Karmenu **Vella** said: *"With the European Natura 2000 Day we pay tribute to this unique network and its value for people and our economy. For me it is one of the European Union's truly outstanding achievements: a network of over 27,000 protected sites, covering over 1 million square kilometres across the land and sea, made possible through the co-operation among all our Member States"*. With the proclamation

of the European Natura 2000 Day, the Commission has fulfilled its first pledge from the recent [Action Plan for nature, people and the economy](#) with the aim to improve communication and outreach, engaging citizens, stakeholders and communities. Already this year, hundreds of local events and networking activities across Europe will mark the day. Today also saw the launch of the next round of the [European Natura 2000 Award](#). This is another Commission initiative dedicated to rewarding excellence in the management and promotion of the network and raising awareness about Natura 2000 and its benefits to European citizens. More information is available [here](#). (For more information: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: +32 229 56172; Iris Petsa – Tel.: +32 229 93321)

Health Technology Assessment: 87% of citizens and stakeholders support EU cooperation beyond 2020

The Commission has received some 250 replies to its public consultation on strengthening EU cooperation on [Health Technology Assessment](#) (HTA), 25% of which were from citizens and 75% from stakeholders. Almost all respondents (98%) acknowledge the usefulness of HTA, 81% consider the current EU cooperation on HTA to be useful to some degree, and 87% consider that EU cooperation on HTA should continue beyond 2020. Of those who support sustainable EU cooperation on HTA, 80% think the scope should include pharmaceuticals and 72% consider that medical technologies should also be covered. Commenting on these results, Vytenis **Andriukaitis**, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, said *“I am pleased, but not surprised at the overwhelming support for sustainable cooperation on HTA at EU-level. Such cooperation will bring real added value to all countries, through the pooling of resources, exchange of expertise, and the avoidance of duplication. I am keen to finalise a proposal on what form this cooperation will take before the end of the year.”* The results of the public consultation and views expressed by stakeholders in other forums will be summarised in the Synopsis Report which will form part of the Impact Assessment on strengthening EU cooperation on HTA beyond 2020. Read the full [report](#). (For more information: Anca Paduraru – Tel.: +32 229 91269; Aikaterini Apostola – Tel. +32 229 87624)

EU strengthens humanitarian support for Myanmar/Burma, calls for greater aid access

Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos **Stylianides** has concluded his official visit to Myanmar/Burma, announcing new funding of €12 million for the country as part of an overall €27 million package for the South and East Asia and Pacific. As the first Commissioner to visit Northern Rakhine State, he called for greater access for aid organisations working in the area and visited several EU funded humanitarian projects. *“The European Union is committed to supporting those in need in Myanmar/Burma. The recent violence in Northern Rakhine State has created pressing humanitarian needs. During my visit I saw that malnutrition rates have deteriorated after the recent crisis. Our humanitarian partners are helping government authorities develop a food security and nutrition strategy for this region, but we still need better humanitarian access in order to facilitate a quick and full response by aid agencies to assist all affected communities. It is*

*particularly important to help Rohingya civilians who have suffered involuntary displacements as well as supporting their livelihoods.” said Commissioner **Stylianides**. Since 1994, the European Commission has provided €229 million in humanitarian aid to Myanmar/Burma. Read the full [press release](#) and see the [photo](#) and [video](#) coverage of the visit. (For more information: Carlos Martin Ruiz de Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322, Daniel Puglisi – Tel.:+32 229 69140)*

Aides d’État: la Commission autorise, sous conditions, l’octroi d’une aide en faveur d’une centrale au gaz en Bretagne (France)

La Commission européenne a autorisé, sous conditions, l’aide que la France envisage d’octroyer à la Compagnie électrique de Bretagne en vue de la construction d’une centrale électrique alimentée au gaz à Landivisiau, en Bretagne. L’[enquête approfondie de la Commission](#) a révélé que la mesure était compatible avec les règles de l’UE en matière d’aides d’État, et notamment avec les [lignes directrices de 2014 concernant les aides d’État à la protection de l’environnement et à l’énergie](#). La Commission craignait toutefois que la mesure ne soit susceptible, dans certains cas, d’entraver la concurrence, ce qui risquait de se produire si la CEB était amenée à vendre son électricité à l’opérateur historique national, celui-ci détenant déjà une part significative du marché de la production d’électricité. Elle a donc subordonné son autorisation à la condition que la CEB ne vende pas l’électricité produite dans la centrale de Landivisiau sur la base de contrats à long terme à des entreprises détenant plus de 40 % du marché français de la capacité de production d’électricité. Au vu de ces éléments, la Commission est parvenue à la conclusion que la mesure était conforme aux règles de l’UE en matière d’aides d’État, étant à la fois nécessaire et proportionnée pour répondre aux préoccupations en termes de sécurité d’approvisionnement électrique en Bretagne. M^{me} Margrethe **Vestager**, commissaire chargée de la politique de concurrence, a déclaré à ce sujet: *«La construction de la centrale électrique de Landivisiau, en Bretagne, contribuera à garantir l’absence de coupures de courant dans cette région, tout en préservant la concurrence sur le marché de l’électricité. La Commission a travaillé en étroite collaboration avec la France afin de s’assurer que l’aide octroyée en vue de la construction de cette centrale satisfait aux règles de l’UE en matière d’aides d’État.»* Voir le communiqué de presse en [EN](#), [FR](#), [DE](#). (Pour plus d’informations: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Yizhou Ren – Tel.: +32 229 94889)

State aid: Commission finds Portugal’s extension of hydro-power concessions to EDP does not involve state aid

The European Commission has concluded that the extension of hydro power concessions granted by Portugal to the national incumbent Electricidade de Portugal SA (EDP) does not involve state aid. The use of public water resources for electricity production in Portugal is subject to a concession agreement. The government picks a concessionaire following specific procedures determined by law. In 2007, Portugal extended several hydro power concessions beyond the termination date that had originally been granted

(2020 in average). These extensions were granted to EDP against the payment of €704 million. This measure was never notified to the Commission for state aid approval and has the effect of maintaining 27 hydro power plants under the control of EDP, together accounting for 27% of Portugal's generation capacity. In September 2013, following the receipt of complaints, the Commission opened a [formal investigation](#) into the measure. The main concerns related to the price paid by EDP for the extension of the concessions and to the market impact of the extension given EDP's strong position on the Portuguese market. During the formal investigation, the Commission verified that the compensation paid by EDP for the extension of the hydro power concessions was in line with market conditions. On this basis, the Commission has now concluded that the compensation paid by EDP for the extension of the concessions does not involve state aid. A full press release is available online in [EN](#), [DE](#), [FR](#) and [PT](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Yizhou Ren – Tel.: +32 22994889)

Antitrust: Commission opens formal investigation into Aspen Pharma's pricing practices for cancer medicines

The European Commission has opened a formal investigation into concerns that Aspen Pharma has engaged in excessive pricing concerning five life-saving cancer medicines. The Commission will investigate whether Aspen has abused a dominant market position in breach of EU antitrust rules. The investigation concerns Aspen's pricing practices for niche medicines containing the active pharmaceutical ingredients chlorambucil, melphalan, mercaptopurine, tioguanine and busulfan. The medicines in question are used for treating cancer, such as hematologic tumours. The Commission will investigate information indicating that Aspen has imposed very significant and unjustified price increases of up to several hundred percent, so-called 'price gouging'. The Commission has information that, for example, to impose such price increases, Aspen has threatened to withdraw the medicines in question in some Member States and has actually done so in certain cases. This is the Commission's first investigation into concerns about excessive pricing practices in the pharmaceutical industry. Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said: *"When we get sick, we may depend on specific drugs to save or prolong our lives. Companies should be rewarded for producing these pharmaceuticals to ensure that they keep making them into the future. But when the price of a drug suddenly goes up by several hundred percent, this is something the Commission may look at. More specifically, in this case we will be assessing whether Aspen is breaking EU competition rules by charging excessive prices for a number of medicines."* A full press release is available online in [EN](#), [DE](#) and [FR](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Brocade by Broadcom, subject to conditions

The European Commission has cleared under the EU Merger Regulation the proposed acquisition of networking products supplier Brocade (US) by

semiconductor manufacturer Broadcom (US/Singapore), subject to conditions on interoperability and protection of competitors' confidential information. The Commission had competition concerns regarding the relationship between the parties created by the transaction as notified, as well as regarding the complementarity between Broadcom's and Brocade's products. The Commission's investigation focused on two areas: (i) chips needed for Fibre Channel Storage Area Network and Internet Protocol networking products, and (ii) switches and cards for Fibre Channel Storage Area Networks, which are complementary products. To address these concerns, Broadcom committed to cooperate closely and in a timely manner with competing HBA cards suppliers to achieve the same level of interoperability as that of its own HBA cards and to protect third party confidential information. In view of the proposed remedies, the Commission concluded that the transaction, as modified by the commitments, would no longer raise competition concerns. The decision is conditional upon full compliance with the commitments. A full press release is available online in [EN](#), [DE](#), [FR](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Mergers: Commission approves merger between chemical producers Reichhold and Polynt, subject to conditions

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the merger between chemical producers Reichhold (US) and Polynt (Italy). Both produce unsaturated polyester resins, used to make reinforced plastics. The decision is conditional on divestment of Reichhold's Etain plant in France. Both Reichhold and Polynt are active in the manufacturing of chemicals. Both companies produce and sell unsaturated polyester resins. Following the market investigation, the Commission concluded that the transaction, as notified, raised competition concerns in the market for the production and sale of unsaturated polyester resins. This is notably in view of the relatively high combined market shares of the merged entity and its extensive network of plants, as compared to its main competitors. To address the competition concerns identified by the Commission, Reichhold and Polynt offered to divest Reichhold's largest unsaturated polyester resin plant, in Etain, north-east France, together with the plant's customer and product information. The Commission therefore concluded that the proposed merger, as modified by the commitments, would no longer raise competition concerns. The decision is conditional upon full compliance with the commitments. A full press release is available online in [EN](#), [DE](#), [FR](#) and [IT](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of a shopping mall in Leipzig by Ares and Baupost

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of the Nova Eventis shopping mall in Leipzig, Germany by Ares Management, L.P. (Ares) and the Baupost Group, L.L.C (Baupost), both of the USA. The Nova Eventis shopping mall is held and operated by Prejan Enterprises Limited. Ares is a publicly traded global alternative asset manager investing, among others, in real estate and holding residential, retail, office and industrial properties in Europe. Baupost is an investment organisation that invests in a range of financial instruments, asset classes

and geographic regions. Through the transaction, Ares and Baupost acquired joint control over Prejan Enterprises Limited. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would not raise competition concerns because of its limited impact on the market structure. 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.8388](#). *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)*

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of S&T by Ennoconn

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of S&T of Austria by Ennoconn of Taiwan. Hon Hai Precision Co Ltd of Taiwan holds an equity interest in Ennoconn. S&T develops hardware- and software-based appliances and embedded systems. Both Ennoconn and Hon Hai are providers of electronic manufacturing services. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would not raise competition concerns because the companies' activities are mostly complementary and S&T has a limited presence in the markets for embedded systems and smart grid solutions. The transaction was examined under the normal merger review procedure. More information is available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the public [case register](#) under the case number [M.8415](#). *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)*

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