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- Labour's leaked plans for Scotland spell more chaos and confusion

11 May 2017



Labour's leaked election manifesto has exposed more confusion in the party's position on a second independence referendum.

The document commits a Labour government to establishing "a constitutional convention to examine and advise on reform of the at Britain works at a fundamental level".

It follows Scottish Labour leader Kezia Dugdale's call for Britain to become a federal country, with looser ties between Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Ms Dugdale said in February a federal UK should be an option on the ballot paper in the event of a second independence referendum.

The following month, Jeremy Corbyn said he was "absolutely fine" with a second referendum being held.

**Scottish Conservative candidate in Edinburgh South West Miles Briggs said:**

"Labour's leaked manifesto claims the party is opposed to a second referendum – yet we know Jeremy Corbyn has said he is "absolutely fine" with a referendum.

"Just as Labour can't seem to publish a manifesto properly, nor can we trust a word they say on the Union.

"The SNP's obsession with independence is costing Scotland dear, as this week's shameful statistics on the state of our education system shows.

"Years and years of Labour navel gazing over the constitution would be just as damaging and who knows where it would end?"

Announcing her support for federalism last December, Kezia Dugdale said details should be thrashed out in a constitutional convention that "would follow the model" of the Scottish Constitutional Convention – raising the prospect of years of constitutional wrangling.

The body dominated political debate in Scotland for six years, from 1989 to 1995, before the creation of the Scottish Parliament.

Scottish Labour's plan for federalism is vague but potentially could leave only defence, foreign affairs and the currency as UK-wide issues – similar to the SNP's discredited proposal for 'full fiscal autonomy'.

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## [The Tories' failed economic plan is holding Britain back – John McDonnell](#)

**John McDonnell,**  
**Labour's Shadow Chancellor,** commenting on today's Bank of England Inflation report, said:

"Today's downgraded growth, earnings and productivity forecasts and upgraded inflations forecasts, signal bad news for living standards under the Tories.

"These forecasts from the Bank of England come on the back of disappointing growth for the first three months of the year and downgraded forecasts from leading independent forecasters for the UK economy.

"There is no hiding from the truth. The Tories' failed economic plan is holding Britain back, and is undermining our economy and threatening working people's living standards.

"This General Election is a choice between a Labour Party who will stand up for the many and a Tory Party which only looks after the privileged few."

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## [Speech: London Somalia Conference 2017: President Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed's opening speech](#)

Your Excellency, the Right Honourable Theresa May, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom,

His Excellency, António Guterres, the Secretary General of the United Nations,

His Excellency, Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairman of the African Union Commission, Heads of States and Governments in attendance,

Representatives of nations and organizations,

### [Future for Somalia – Opening Statements](#)

It is indeed a great honour to be addressing you all today at this special conference on Somalia's future in this beautiful city of London. I'm delighted to be sharing this historic day with our key partners all of whom have stood by our people and nation in our greatest period of need.

I would like to take this opportunity to especially thank our great host, Prime Minister Theresa May and her government for committing to and bringing this conference to fruition. As many of you know, this is NOT the first conference for Somalia hosted by the UK. For that, we thank you Prime Minister!

Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, as you are all aware, Somalia successfully concluded a long and complicated election process on the 8 February 2017. On that day, representatives of the Somali people voted for change and a new direction for our country. I was humbled by the enormous public support I received following the election.

I am, however, very aware of the high expectations the Somali people have for me – starting with improved security and provision of basic services such as health and education. Although we are working tirelessly to meet everyone's expectations, in the meantime we hope to gradually improve our citizens' lives.

The successful and peaceful transfer of power following my election was a reminder of Somalia's potential as a beacon of democracy and hope in one of the most unstable regions in the world.

In fact, Somalia has a long and proud tradition of democracy going back to independence in 1960. We were the first country in Africa wherein a sitting president transferred power peacefully after losing national elections.

Despite the enormous challenges my country faces, we strive to those ideals. We believe that the only path to fully recovering Somalia is strengthening our democratic institutions. To that end, I will spare no effort to realizing the promise of my campaign, which was to fight Somalia's 3 major enemies: terrorism, corruption and poverty.

My vision revolves around these 3 issues. And the way to address them starts with building vital state institutions, with a focus on security apparatuses, and championing an overall reform agenda. Most importantly, I will take measurable steps to unleash the great potential of my people to develop their own country, and to do what they know best: trade and commerce. I strongly believe that trade is the surest way to reduce poverty and generate mass employment.

Excellencies, distinguished guests and ladies and gentlemen, my reform agenda

started with selecting a capable and proven leader as a Prime Minister. Prime Minister Hassan Ali Khayre brings decades of experience as a senior executive in humanitarian and development sectors, and later as a successful businessman.

Capitalizing on his experience and networks, and following extensive consultations with all actors, the Prime Minister formed a technocratic cabinet that includes 5 female ministers – the largest in our history – and many young ministers representing 85% of our population who are under the age of 40.

One of the new young ministers was a former refugee in Dadaab – the world's largest refugee camp in Kenya. His compelling story gives insight into the transformation my country is going through. Unfortunately, his life was cut short last week. But his legacy remains with us.

Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentleman, I recognize that a good cabinet is only as good as the services it delivers its people. And in Somalia, delivering anything hinges largely on 'getting the politics right'. Good politics must be inclusive, participatory, vibrant and on a levelled playing field.

In this regard, we are committed to solidifying our federal system of governance, which has been in place only since 2004. Our overall vision is to achieve a strong and co-operative union which works for all Somalis and enhances equity and good governance.

We are thankfully a step closer to this objective as is illustrated by the recent historic formation of the new National Security Council, which includes federal member states. The National Security Council is not only a platform for dialogue on security issues, but on broader matters of national importance. The fact that all heads of federal member states are with me here today speaks volumes of our collective effort towards a strong and co-operative union.

Together with other stakeholders, we will be engaging in an in-depth discussion around matters of national importance. We are already engaged in a deep dialogue on sharing of natural and national resources. This and other areas will be discussed in the context of the constitutional review process. As the leaders of Somalia, we recognize that the Constitution is the document that binds us together.

However, our political efforts will not stop there. In the coming months, we will complete legislation around political parties so that all MPs and others interested groups can form their parties legally. We are determined to encourage a vibrant political environment which upholds the best practices of democracy, freedom of assembly and freedom of speech—all of which are enshrined in our Constitution.

Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, security remains paramount for my administration. The new National Security Architecture and the Security Pact give us the tools we need to strengthen the Somali National

Army and introduce an improved policing model.

Together with the African Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), I am confident that we can defeat Al-Shabaab in the next few years. Once we recover the remaining territories and secure supply routes, we will stabilize the country by building local administrations in collaboration with the federal member states. We believe that communities are best placed to collaborate with the local, state and federal governments to stabilize the country.

But the government needs the necessary tools to be able to defeat Al-Shabaab. For far too long, our security forces and terrorist groups have been fighting using the same type of light weapons – mostly AK47s. Despite the bravery of our men and women in uniform, we were locked in symmetrical battles with the terrorists. Without AMISOM forces, who are supplied with heavy weaponry, we would not have been able to defeat Al-Shabaab. The longstanding arms embargo on Somalia severely restricts our ability to procure heavy weapons, despite the partial lifting of the embargo in 2013.

Time has come for Somalia to be able to get access to qualitatively better weapons than terrorists. In this regard, we are working with our partners and the Security Council to develop a clearly defined roadmap to the full lifting of the arms embargo. This would include the improvements we must make to our weapons management, command and control systems.

Excellencies, distinguished guests and ladies and gentlemen, when it comes to the security sector support we receive from our friends, we are grateful to all partners for their unwavering and sustained support over the years. Many provide financial support, while others provide technical and logistical support. One partner I would like to dedicate special gratitude is AMISOM. Their peacekeepers have been working with us for 10 years – much longer than anyone expected. During that time, they have sacrificed many soldiers in the quest to help Somalia defeat Al-Shabaab and rebuild our security forces.

A vital element of rebuilding our security apparatuses is to radically improve on coordination among international partners on the security front. I welcome the genuine attempt to address this fundamental problem through the creation of the Comprehensive Assistance to Security or CAS Group. This group, in close collaboration with the National Security Office, must end duplicity and fragmentation in the security support sector. On our side, the National Security Council is designed to do the same.

Excellencies, distinguished guests and ladies and gentlemen, the insecurity situation cannot be changed without addressing its root causes, which are abject poverty and mass unemployment. Too many of our young generation are sitting idle, creating fertile ground for terrorists to recruit from. We must tackle this issue with a robust economic recovery plan.

To this end, we have identified the 'priorities of the priorities' within the National Development Plan (NDP). The NDP, which clearly articulates our development agenda, is based on sound evidence and extensive consultations across the country. Our partners should align their support with priorities of the NDP, which are focused on strategic investments in key sectors, such

as the productive sectors of agriculture, livestock and fishing. Moreover, major investment would have to be made in vital infrastructure, starting with renewable energy, clean water and road networks. That's the only way to create mass employment.

But all that investment needs substantial resources, and our meagre revenue can barely cover our budget. Access to international financial institutions is restricted due to the existing arrears. In this regard, I'm delighted that we have now developed a well-defined, milestones-based roadmap to arrears clearance and normalisation of relations with the international financial institutions. I commend the work of the World Bank and IMF, together with our Finance Ministry, on this crucial work. This is an area that I will personally follow, to ensure that we are meeting our obligations.

Many countries and organizations have demonstrated willingness to cancel their loans. Here I recognize the League of Arab States who announced that member states are prepared to forgive their loans during their summit in Amman in March. We are grateful to our Arab brothers and sisters for this.

Excellencies, distinguished guests and ladies and gentlemen, when it comes to economic development, the greatest asset we have is the entrepreneurial spirit of my people. My administration will take measurable steps to unlock their potential, by removing barriers to doing business in Somalia, and promoting small and media enterprises.

One major barrier is the inability of our financial institutions to access their international counterparts. The money transfer businesses, who send a combined amount of about \$2 billion dollars a year to Somalia, are struggling to access banks here in the UK and in the United States, due to the severe restrictions placed on them. This, despite the fact that we made tangible progress over the past few years.

Time has come to facilitate access for our financial institutions to work with your banks. A continuation of the current policy will undoubtedly deprive crucial access for our banks, and, as a consequence, will limit employment opportunities in the financial sector.

Excellencies, distinguished guests and ladies and gentlemen, for too long, the conventional wisdom has been that Somalia was a problem to fix, and the people a perfect humanitarian example due to the failure of the state to do its job. Today, my administration is committed to seizing this golden opportunity to nurture and deliver on a better, stronger and more prosperous Somalia led by the hopes and aspirations of its people. This is the best way to continue the process of changing the prevailing narrative.

Despite the extraordinary challenges that my people faced, we must remember that they withstood both natural and man-made calamities, and, with their classic resilience, started some of the most successful telecoms and remittance companies in Africa.

Together with our partners, my administration aims to capitalize on this God-given talent for a better Somalia – one that can secure itself, manage its

politics and revive its economy. The New Partnership for Somalia provides an excellent framework for co-operation and coordination. The NPS puts government leadership at the heart of implementation of programs and projects. It allows us to hold each other accountable, which I wholeheartedly welcome. If my administration fails, we hope you hold us to account. We promise to do the same. Only in that spirit can we lift Somalia to new heights.

Excellencies, distinguished guests and ladies and gentlemen, there have been many conferences in the past on Somalia and for Somalia. Today's events are different because I can assure and reassure you all that Somalia will never turn back to its difficult past: it will only go forward towards progress and prosperity as is the will of its people and the priority of its government. In engaging with us on the vast array of issues for discussion ahead during this conference, please be confident of the sincerity of this promise.

I thank you all.

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## [The European Union steps up its support to Somalia with €200 million at the London Conference](#)

High Representative / Vice-President Federica **Mogherini** who represented the EU at today's conference in London said: *"Somalia's future matters to Europe and our support matters to Somalia. The €200 million we have announced today strengthens the EU's leading role in supporting the country's development, stability and security. We already play a major role for peace in the country through the three active missions in the country as well as our support to the African Union peacekeeping mission AMISOM. We believe that the people of Somalia can and should shape the future of their country. We want Somalia to rise again – and today we demonstrate it in very practical terms."*

The development funding announced today will be channelled through the European Union Trust Fund for Africa, which aims to address the root causes of destabilization, forced displacement and irregular migration.

Neven **Mimica**, Commissioner in charge of International Cooperation and Development, added: *"Today's support package of €200 million is new and additional to what we already do in Somalia. It will focus on building effective and sustainable responses to security challenges, on creating economic opportunities and on building state legitimacy and democratic governance. We are also concerned by the severe drought in Somalia and the humanitarian challenges this brings. Together with EU Member States, we have already allocated than €460 million humanitarian and development assistance for that purpose. We call on other partners to stand up to the level of the*

*challenge as well.”*

The EU's support will help to accelerate Somalia's economic recovery. This will be done by supporting the reforms needed to ensure Somalia full re-engagement with the International Financial Institutions, access to multilateral finance and debt relief. This will also help laying the foundations for more inclusive, stable politics including a roadmap to a more inclusive electoral process in 2020.

The EU is a long standing partner to Somalia in development aid, peacekeeping operations and humanitarian aid. For the period 2015-2020, the EU and its Member States cooperation including development, humanitarian aid and peacekeeping operations amounts to €3.4 billion.

### **Background:**

The Somalia Conference took place today in London, co-chaired by the Federal Government of Somalia, the United Nations and the United Kingdom. The Conference aims to agree a Security Pact which sets the foundations for Somalia long-term security and on a New Partnership for Somalia between the International Community and Somalia based on principles of mutual accountability. The Conference is also the opportunity to take stock of the response to the humanitarian crisis affecting Somalia.

Today's support package comes on top of the €286 million, which the European Commission has allocated under the 11th European Development Fund (for the period 2014-2020), which focusses on strengthening state functions, improving food security and resilience as well as education for young people. EU financing is implemented mostly through grants implemented by UN agencies and international NGOs, or contributions to Trust Funds.

### **For more information:**

[Factsheet: EU support for Somalia](#)

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## **Daily News 11 / 05 / 2017**

### **Discours du Président Juncker au Sénat et au Parlement roumain réunis en Congrès**

A l'occasion de sa visite en Roumanie, le Président **Juncker** s'est adressé aux sénateurs et parlementaires roumains réunis en Congrès. Il a rappelé à cette occasion le chemin parcouru par la Roumanie depuis son adhésion à l'Union européenne en 2007 soulignant qu'il fallait aussi *“se souvenir que ce chemin fut difficile et exigeant”*. Et il a rendu *“un hommage solennel au courage et à la volonté du peuple roumain et de ses dirigeants politiques qui tenaient une boussole européenne entre leurs mains”*. Evoquant les réformes qui doivent

être encore faites, le Président **Juncker** a rappelé qu'il s'est engagé "à supprimer le Mécanisme de coopération et de vérification d'ici la fin du mandat de ma Commission" ajoutant "avec vous, je ferai tout pour honorer l'engagement qui fut celui de ma Commission. Et je voudrais souligner, dans l'appellation de ce mécanisme, l'importance du mot coopération. Coopération veut dire collaborer à une action commune visant la même fin." Il a par ailleurs souligné que "la place naturelle et méritée de la Roumanie est au sein de l'espace Schengen." Par ailleurs le Président **Juncker** a déclaré que pour lui en Europe, "il n'y aura jamais de pays de seconde catégorie ou de pays qu'on aurait abandonné en chemin. Je vous le garantis et j'en fais le serment car, lorsqu'elle est unie, l'Europe peut réaliser de grandes choses." Et il a rappelé que la Roumanie a participé à la plupart des coopérations renforcées, "ce qui n'est pas toujours le cas des Etats membres fondateurs. Aucune de ces coopérations structurées n'a créé de nouvelles lignes de divisions." Ainsi, a-t-il dit "la Roumanie nous donne une belle leçon d'ambition pour l'avenir". Le discours est disponible [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Margaritis Schinas – Tel.: +32 229 60524; Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 229 91382)

### **Spring 2017 Economic Forecast: steady growth ahead**

The European economy has entered its fifth year of recovery, which is now reaching all EU Member States. This is expected to continue at a largely steady pace this year and next. In its Spring Forecast released today, the European Commission expects euro area GDP growth of 1.7% in 2017 and 1.8% in 2018 (1.6% and 1.8% in the Winter Forecast). GDP growth in the EU as a whole is expected to remain constant at 1.9% in both years (1.8% in both years in the Winter Forecast). Pierre **Moscovici**, Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs, said: "Europe is entering its fifth consecutive year of growth, supported by accommodative monetary policies, robust business and consumer confidence and improving world trade. It is good news too that the high uncertainty that has characterised the past twelve months may be starting to ease. But the euro area recovery in jobs and investment remains uneven. Tackling the causes of this divergence is the key challenge we must address in the months and years to come." The full press release is available [here](#). The Spring 2017 Economic Forecast is available [here](#). Commissioner **Moscovici's** remarks (including [slides](#)) will shortly be available [here](#). (For more information: Annika Breidhardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153; Enda McNamara – Tel.: +32 229 64976)

### **Commission welcomes the adoption of EU technical support programme by EU Ministers**

The European Commission welcomes today's adoption by the EU Council of Ministers to approve the new EUR 142.8 million Structural Reform Support Programme (SRSP). The programme allows the Commission to expand the tailor-made reform support it provides to Member States, at their request, as they carry out reforms that help their economies to grow, strengthen competitiveness, encourage investment and offer job opportunities. The support is managed by the Commission's Structural Reform Support Service

(SRSS). Valdis **Dombrovskis**, Vice-President for the Euro and Social Dialogue, also in charge of Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union said: *"We welcome today's adoption by EU Ministers of the Structural Reform Support Programme. This new EU programme will allow the Commission to expand the technical support it provides to help Member States carry out essential reforms that can help modernise economies, strengthen competitiveness, encourage investment. This in turn, can generate jobs and raise living standards. From the economic forecast also published today, we see economic growth continuing in the EU, but the picture varies from Member State to Member State. Technical support from the new EU programme can help Member States address challenges that are holding back more effective economic and social progress."* (For more information: Annika Breidthardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153; Juliana Dahl – Tel.: +32 229 59914)

### **The European Union steps up its support to Somalia with €200 million at the London Conference**

The European Commission has announced new support today worth €200 million at the London Conference on Somalia where partners agreed on a Security Pact for the country. High Representative / Vice-President Federica **Mogherini** who represented the EU at today's conference said: *"Somalia's future matters to Europe and our support matters to Somalia. The €200 million we have announced today strengthens the EU's leading role in supporting the country's development, stability and security. We already play a major role for peace in the country through the three active missions in the country as well as our support to the African Union peacekeeping mission AMISOM. We believe that the people of Somalia can and should shape the future of their country. We want Somalia to rise again – and today we demonstrate it in very practical terms."* Neven **Mimica**, Commissioner in charge of International Cooperation and Development, added: *"Today's support package of €200 million is new and additional to what we already do in Somalia. It will focus on building effective and sustainable responses to security challenges, on creating economic opportunities and on building state legitimacy and democratic governance. We are also concerned by the severe drought in Somalia and the humanitarian challenges this brings. (...) The EU is a long standing partner to Somalia in development aid, peacekeeping operations and humanitarian aid. Read the full [press release](#) and [factsheet](#). (For more information: Catherine Ray – Tel.: +32 229 69921; Daniel Puglisi – Tel.: +32 229 69140; Christina Wunder – Tel.: +32 229 92256)*

### **European Commission launches public consultation on the modernisation of EU company law**

The European Commission just launched a public consultation on how to improve EU company law. Commissioner Vera **Jourová** said: *"Our Internal Market offers vast opportunities to European companies and thereby is a driver for jobs and growth. But EU company law rules are not up to speed with the digital age and businesses still struggle with uncertainties in many cross-border situations. We need to provide modern and clear rules. And we need a modern approach towards administering them: Companies should be able to use digital tools at*

*every step, from registration to filing, and when communicating with shareholders.”* The consultation will help the Commission assess the best way forward with regards to the scope and the content of a possible future initiative on EU company law. The initiative would aim to make the internal market simpler and fairer by allowing a greater use of digital tools, by providing clearer and legally certain EU procedures for some cross border operations and by ensuring more effective protection through safeguards and improved access to relevant information for all stakeholders concerned, in particular for creditors and employees. It would seek to fight against the abuses of social rights and possibilities of fraud. The current EU company law is not adapted to the digital age yet nor sufficiently supportive of the development of a fully-fledged, seamless Internal Market. It does not allow companies to reap all the benefits of digital technologies nor provide a comprehensive framework for cross-border mobility of companies and clear rules on the jurisdiction that applies to companies in case of cross-border conflicts. The public consultation seeks to collect views from a broad range of stakeholders, as well as from the public on three points: 1) on the use of digital tools and processes throughout a company’s lifecycle, 2) on the cross-border mobility of companies (mergers, divisions, conversions) and 3) on the conflict-of-law rules for companies. The results of the consultation will feed into the company law initiative, announced by the Commission in its 2017 Work Programme. The consultation is available [here](#) this afternoon and will be open until the 6 August July 2017. (For more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Mélanie Voin – Tel.: +32 229 58659)

### **Implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty: political compromise achieved, better access to books for blind and other disabled people**

Negotiators of the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission reached yesterday a [compromise](#) on draft legislation to implement the Marrakesh Treaty in the European Union. The Commission welcomes the political compromise which will help millions of blind and other print disabled people to get better access to books. The objective of the proposals, made by the Commission as part of the ongoing [modernisation of the EU copyright law](#), is to facilitate access to published works for persons who are blind, have other visual impairments or are otherwise print disabled. The deal will be now subject to the formal approval by the two EU co-legislators. Following the political compromise, Vice-President for the Digital Single Market Andrus **Ansip** said: *“I am delighted that EU copyright rules will now be adapted to allow visually impaired and people with reading disabilities to access a wider range of reading material in the EU and in third countries that they can use for their education, work and entertainment. I am particularly pleased that our Digital Single Market strategy creates more social inclusion. And I am also confident that this compromise today will pave the way for a rapid ratification of the Marrakesh treaty by the EU.”* Further details can be found in the [press release](#). (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Inga Höglund – Tel.: +32 229 50698)

### **Juncker Plan: EUR 177 million for Romanian SMEs**

The [Juncker Plan](#) has backed a European Investment Fund agreement with Raiffeisen Bank that will unlock EUR 177 million in loans to small and medium-sized Romanian businesses. Around 2,000 Romanian SMEs are expected to benefit from these loans. The European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), the central pillar of the Juncker Plan, was a crucial factor in making this loan agreement possible. **Corina Crețu**, Commissioner for Regional Policy, said: *“The Juncker Plan is working to support jobs and spur growth across Europe. Facilitating access to finance for small and medium-sized businesses is an important component of the Plan. I am delighted that, with today’s agreement, more Romanian businesses will be able to invest in expansion, job-creation and innovation thanks to the Juncker Plan.”* As of April 2017, the Juncker Plan is expected to trigger around EUR 743 million in investments in Romania. For the latest figures country-by-country, see [here](#). A full press release is available [here](#). (For more information: Annika Breidhardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153; Enda McNamara – Tel.: +32 229 64976)

### **Commissioner Navracsics welcomes Tunisia to the Creative Europe programme**

Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Tibor **Navracsics**, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tunisia, Khemaies Jhinaoui, have today signed an Agreement on Tunisia’s participation in [Creative Europe](#), the EU programme for the cultural and creative sectors. The signing ceremony took place in Brussels during the EU-Tunisia Association Council meeting. Commissioner **Navracsics** said: *“I welcome the prospect of strengthening EU-Tunisia relations through culture and direct contacts between people. Tunisia will be the first Southern Neighbourhood country to join Creative Europe and the signature of this Agreement is particularly welcome as one of the concrete deliverables of the EU’s strategy on international cultural relations.”* The Agreement will now have to be ratified by the Tunisian Parliament (Assemblée des Représentants du Peuple) before it enters into force, with Tunisia’s participation scheduled to begin on 1 January 2018. Tunisian cultural and audio-visual operators will then be able to participate fully in the [Culture sub-programme](#) and partially in the [MEDIA sub-programme](#) (i.e. training, film festivals, film education, and market access activities) of Creative Europe. Ahead of the signing ceremony, Commissioner **Navracsics** had a bilateral meeting with Minister Jhinaoui to discuss current EU-Tunisian relations in the field of culture, education and youth. (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Inga Höglund – Tel. +32 229 56184)

### **La Commission approuve une nouvelle appellation d’origine protégée de Slovaquie**

La Commission européenne a approuvé la demande d’inscription du [«Stupavské zelé»](#) dans le registre des appellations d’origine protégées (AOP). Le «Stupavské zelé» est une choucroute obtenue grâce à la fermentation lactique de choux blancs crus cultivés dans la commune de Stupava et ses environs, située dans l’ouest du pays à quelques kilomètres au nord de Bratislava.

“Zelé” signifie chou dans le dialecte local. A travers l’histoire, les livraisons de choucroute provenant de la région en question ont rapidement dominé les marchés de légumes de Vienne à un point tel que les Viennois en sont venus à appeler *Slowakisches Salat* la *Sauerkraut* traditionnelle. Les producteurs locaux se sont d’ailleurs associés au XIXe siècle pour fonder la «Société de fabrique de zelé», lançant ainsi leur production industrielle. La choucroute est devenue un produit apprécié en Europe dans la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle, quand la richesse du chou en vitamine C a commencé à être connue. La méthode de production traditionnelle sans le moindre ajout de conservateurs a été conservée jusqu’à aujourd’hui. Cette nouvelle appellation va rejoindre plus de 1390 produits déjà protégés dont la liste est disponible dans la base de données [DOOR](#). Pour plus d’informations, voir aussi les pages sur la [politique de qualité](#). (Pour plus d’information: Daniel Rosario – Tel: +32 2 29 56185; Clémence Robin – Tel: +32 229 52 509)

### **State aid: Commission authorises more gradual sale of Slovenia’s Nova Ljubljanska Banka**

The European Commission has endorsed a request by the Slovenian State for a more gradual sale of Slovenian bank Nova Ljubljanska Banka (NLB), amending the Commission’s 2013 [state aid Decision](#) concerning NLB’s restructuring. As part of the 2013 Commission decision, the Slovenian authorities had committed to sell a certain proportion of the State’s shares in the bank before a specified confidential deadline. Slovenia will sell a first tranche within the original deadline but requested additional time to sell a second tranche. Apart from the timing Slovenia remains fully committed to divest the initially foreseen stake. In this context, Slovenia furthermore proposed an extension of the bank’s acquisition ban. On the basis of the amended commitments, the Commission has concluded that the aid to NLB remains compatible with EU state aid rules. More information will be available on the Commission’s [competition](#) website, in the [public case register](#) under the case number [SA.33229](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni- Tel.: +32 229 90526)

### **Mergers: Commission clears creation of joint venture between Linde AG and PJSC Power Machines**

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of joint control of Linde Power Machines LLC, a newly-established Russian joint venture company, by Linde AG of Germany and PJSC Power Machines of Russia. Linde Power Machines LLC will be active in engineering, production and distribution of stainless steel heat exchange equipment for natural gas liquefaction units as well as provision of related services and spare parts. Linde AG is an international gas and technology group active in industrial gases, medical gases, equipment, engineering and services sectors. PJSC Power Machines is a manufacturer of power generation equipment and other devices for power plants, in particular turbines and generators. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would not raise competition concerns,

as the joint venture will operate primarily in Russia and the transaction will not change the competitive landscape in the European Economic Area. 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.8426](#). *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni- Tel.: +32 229 90526)*

#### **Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of USI Insurance Services by KKR and CDPQ**

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of indirect joint control of USI Insurance Services (“USI”) by KKR & Co. L.P. (“KKR”), both of the US, and Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec (“CDPQ”) of Canada. USI is an insurance brokerage and consulting firm active in property and casualty insurance, employee benefits, personal risk services, retirement, program and specialty solutions in the US. KKR is a global investment firm, which offers asset management services and provides capital markets solutions. CDPQ is an institutional investor active globally, which manages funds primarily for the public and para-public pension and insurance plans. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, as the joint venture does not and will not have any activities in the European Economic Area. 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.8462](#). *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni- Tel.: +32 229 90526)*

#### **Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of joint control over McDonald's China Management Limited by Carlyle and CITIC together with McDonald's**

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of McDonald's China Management Limited by McDonald's Corporation and The Carlyle Group ('Carlyle'), both of the USA, jointly with CITIC Capital and CITIC Limited (together “CITIC”) of the People's Republic of China. McDonald's China Management Limited includes over 2000 McDonald's restaurants in mainland China, Hong Kong and Macau. McDonald's is active worldwide in the quick service restaurant industry, operating and franchising McDonald's restaurants in over 36 000 locations in more than 100 countries. Carlyle manages funds that invest globally in corporate private equity, real assets, global market strategies and solutions. CITIC is engaged in both financial and non-financial businesses. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would not raise competition concerns because of its limited impact on the market structure, as the target has no actual or foreseen activities within the territory of the European Economic Area. 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.8384](#). *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni- Tel.: +32 229 90526)*

#### **Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of joint control over Telxius by KKR**

## **and current owner Telefónica**

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of joint control over Telxius Telecom S.A. of Spain by KKR & Co. L.P. of the US and the current owner Telefónica S.A. also of Spain. Telxius provides infrastructure services through its telecom infrastructure assets, including telecommunication towers and subterranean/submarine fibre-optic cables. KKR is a global investment firm investing in companies in a variety of sectors. One of KKR's portfolio companies is active in retail telecommunication services in Germany, which are related to Telxius activities in wholesale transmission capacity. Telefónica is a global telecommunications operator and mobile network provider active in mobile, landline, internet and television telecommunication services. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, because it does not create horizontal overlaps between the companies' activities. In addition, the overlaps between KKR and Telxius' activities on related markets are limited. 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.8427](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni- Tel.: +32 229 90526)

## **Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of joint control of IPTO by the Hellenic State and Chinese State Grid**

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of joint control of the Greek Independent Power Transmission Operator S.A. ("IPTO") by the Hellenic State and the State Grid International Development Limited ("SGID") of China. IPTO, currently solely controlled by the Hellenic State, is the Greek electricity transmission system operator. SGID is controlled by the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council of the People's Republic of China ("Central SASAC"). It is primarily engaged in the investment and operation of regulated electricity transmission and distribution businesses outside China. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, because there are no horizontal overlaps or vertical links between the activities of IPTO and SGID (or other companies controlled by Central SASAC). 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.8379](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni- Tel.: +32 229 90526)

## **Eurostat: Demandeurs d'asile considérés comme mineurs non accompagnés – 63 300 mineurs non accompagnés parmi les demandeurs d'asile dans l'UE en 2016 – Plus de la moitié sont soit Afghans soit Syriens**

En 2016, 63 300 demandeurs d'asile sollicitant une protection internationale dans les États membres de l'Union européenne (UE) étaient considérés comme étant des mineurs non accompagnés, un nombre en baisse d'environ un tiers par rapport à 2015 (avec quelque 96 500 mineurs non accompagnés enregistrés) mais

toujours près de cinq fois supérieur à la moyenne annuelle relevée sur la période 2008-2013 (environ 12 000 par an). En 2016, une forte majorité de ces mineurs non accompagnés étaient des garçons (89%) et plus des deux-tiers étaient âgés de 16 à 17 ans (68%, soit quelque 43 300 personnes), tandis que ceux âgés de 14 à 15 ans représentaient 21% des mineurs non accompagnés (environ 13 500 personnes) et ceux de moins de 14 ans 10% (près de 6 300 personnes). Plus d'un tiers (38%) des demandeurs d'asile considérés comme mineurs non accompagnés dans l'UE en 2016 étaient Afghans et environ un cinquième (19%) Syriens. Un communiqué de presse est disponible [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456; Tove Ernst – Tel.: +32 2 298 67 64; Kasia Kolanko – Tel.; +32 296 34 44)

## STATEMENTS

### **Joint-statement by First Vice-President Timmermans and Commissioner Jourová on the EU accession to international convention combating violence against women**

Following the Council Decision on the signing of the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), First Vice-President **Timmermans** and Commissioner **Jourová** said in a joint-statement: *“Violence against women is violation of human rights and a brutal form of discrimination. One in three women in Europe have experienced violence at least once in her life. The Council’s decision today is a significant step towards the EU becoming – along with its Member States – a full party to the Convention preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. It will allow the EU and its Member States to develop and strengthen the prevention, prosecution and elimination of violence against women and girls and domestic violence.”* The [Istanbul Convention](#) of the Council of Europe is the most comprehensive international treaty on combatting violence against women and domestic violence. It recognises violence against women as a human rights violation. The Convention addresses violence against women through measures aimed at preventing violence, protecting victims, and prosecuting the perpetrators. The European Commission had proposed in March 2016 the EU accession to this international convention. As a next step, the EU will now proceed with the conclusion of the Convention. Full statement is available [online](#), as well as a [factsheet](#) on the Convention and a [factsheet](#) on what the EU does to combat violence against women. (For more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Mélanie Voin – Tel.: +32 229 58659)

### **European Commission welcomes the Council adoption of visa liberalisation for the citizens of Ukraine**

Following the adoption by the Council of the Commission proposal for visa liberalisation for Ukraine, Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris **Avramopoulos** made the following statement: *“One year ago, I was in Kiev to personally congratulate the Ukrainian government for*

*the tremendous efforts they have made to implement the reforms set out under the visa liberalisation process. Today, I am pleased to see that we are reaching the end of the process and I welcome the Council's adoption of visa liberalisation for Ukraine – a final step towards visa-free travel to the Schengen area for Ukrainian citizens. Today's decision is an acknowledgment of the successful and far-reaching reforms carried out by Ukraine, often in very challenging circumstances. Ukraine has come a long way and today this is recognised and rewarded. Now it is important to sustain this progress. The European Union stands ready to continue providing support and assistance to the Ukrainian authorities in this endeavour. Visa-free travel to the Schengen area will soon become a reality – it is an important and well-deserved moment for Ukraine and its citizens that will make our already close relations even stronger.”* The full statement is available [here](#). (For more information: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456 ; Tove Ernst – Tel.: +32 229 86764; Katarzyna Kolanko – Tel.: +32 229 63444)

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **First Vice-President Timmermans in Sweden**

This morning in Stockholm, First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans** had a constructive meeting with Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Löfven, about globalisation, migration, and the EU Social Summit in Gothenburg later this year. This meeting was the start of a programme which concludes this evening with a Citizens' Dialogue which can be followed [live here](#) at 17h00. First Vice-President **Timmermans** also paid his respects this morning to the victims at the site of the terror attack of 7 April, alongside Minister for Home Affairs Anders Ygeman. At 13h00, the First Vice-President will speak at a seminar on '[Better Regulation for a more competitive Europe](#)'. (For more information: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456; Tim McPhie – Tel.: +32 229 58602; Katarzyna Kolanko – Tel.: +32 229 63444)

### **Vice-President Ansip in Greece to discuss digital transformation**

Vice-President for the Digital Single Market Andrus **Ansip** will meet today in Athens several Ministers, Member of the Parliament as well as representatives of Greek enterprises. This morning he discussed Greece's digital economy and relevance of highly skilled workers to master the digital transformation with the Federation of Hellenic ICT Enterprises (SEPE). During his visit to the Hellenic Parliament where he held a speech in front of the European Affairs Commission, Production and Trade Commission and Public Administration Commission. He presented the [review of the Digital Single Market strategy](#) (adopted by the Commission yesterday) and highlighted the importance of the digitisation of the economy, and especially of public services. Vice-President **Ansip** will meet this afternoon with Greek Minister of Digital Policy, Telecommunications and Media Nikos Pappas and with Minister of Administrative Reform and E-Government Olga Gerovasili. The Vice-President will additionally pay a visit to the Athens office of the European Union Agency for Network and Information Security ([ENISA](#)) and thereafter hold a keynote speech at the dinner ahead of the international conference "A Digital Strategy for Greece" organised by Hellenic Federation of Enterprises (SEV). The Conference aims at presenting a roadmap for the digital transformation of

the Greek economy. More live updates from the visit are available on [@Ansip\\_EU](#). (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Inga Höglund – Tel.: +32 229 50698)

### **Commissioner Moscovici participates in G7 Finance Ministers' meeting in Bari, Italy**

Commissioner **Moscovici**, responsible for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs, will represent the European Commission at the [G7 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors' Meeting](#) on 11-13 May in Bari, Italy. The agenda includes discussions on growth and inequality, international taxation, the coordination between international financial institutions and security as a 'global public good' (including issues related to anti-terrorism financing, remittances and cyber security). *"The global economic recovery is firming. In Europe as in the rest of the G7, we now need to find ways to ensure that growth benefits all segments of society. I welcome the decision of the Italian G7 presidency to put growth and equality at the top of the agenda for Bari,"* said Commissioner **Moscovici** in advance of the meeting. The discussions in Bari will pave the way for the G7 Taormina Leaders' Summit on 26-27 May. (For more information: Annika Breidhardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153; Vanessa Mock – Tel.: +32 229 56194)

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