

# Main topics and media events 19 February – 4 March 2018

## Press contacts

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Overview of the main subjects to be discussed at meetings of the Council of the EU over the next two weeks.

## **Agriculture and Fisheries Council, 19 February 2018**

The Council will have exchanges of views on “The Future of Food and Farming” and the revision of the EU bioeconomy strategy, and will be informed about the EU protein plan.

## **Economic and Financial Affairs council, 20 February 2018**

The Council will discuss sustainable finance, issues related to the EU budget and the role of public procurement in investment and innovation.

## **Informal meeting of the 27 heads of state or government, 23 February 2018**

On 23 February EU leaders will meet informally in Brussels under the Leaders' Agenda to discuss institutional issues and the political priorities for the next multiannual financial framework.

## **Foreign Affairs Council, 26 February 2018**

The Council will debate and adopt conclusions on the Republic of Moldova. Foreign ministers will discuss Venezuela, review prospects for the Middle East Peace Process, and prepare for a lunch with representatives of the League of Arab States (LAS). The lunch will be an opportunity to discuss how to pursue further options aimed at achieving a two-state solution jointly with the LAS.

## **General Affairs Council, 27 February 2018**

The Council will begin preparations of the March European Council. The Commission will present its reasoned proposal under Article 7(1)TEU regarding the rule of law in Poland.

# General Affairs (Art. 50) Council, 27 February 2018

The Council, in EU27 format, will be informed by the Commission's chief negotiator Michel Barnier about the state of play of the Brexit negotiations with the UK, and will consider a draft annotated agenda for the next European Council (Article 50).

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## [Press release: Foreign Secretary welcomes new UN Special Envoy for Yemen](#)

I welcome the appointment of Martin Griffiths to the role of UN Special Envoy for Yemen. Mr Griffiths brings a wealth of experience from several high profile UN positions in the region, and is a leading expert on international mediation and conflict resolution.

I would like to thank Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed for his dedication in the role of UN Special Envoy since April 2015, working to facilitate a credible peace process in Yemen.

The UK is at the forefront of international efforts to help bring to Yemen the peace, stability and security that all Yemenis deserve. This can only be reached through an inclusive political settlement. Mr Griffiths and his team will be central to achieving progress and I call upon all parties to engage with the UN process in good faith.

### **Notes to editors:**

The UK strongly supports the work of the UN in Yemen. We support the efforts to reboot a UN peace process as a matter of urgency. By the end of the financial year 2017/18, we will have provided £1.68 million to the UN Special Envoy's office to bolster the UN's capacity to facilitate the peace process.

### **Media enquiries**

For journalists

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## Further information

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# [Gli insegnamenti tratti dall'austerità rendono obbligatorio un cambiamento di politica](#)

**The EESC presents measures to avoid the severity of austerity in the future and to mitigate the negative effects of previous crisis management**

Future crisis management should strive for a better balance between fiscal and social objectives to avoid adverse effects on the economic capacities, labour markets and social protection systems of the countries concerned. Instead of restrictive austerity, the EU institutions should in future crisis situations implement policies in pursuit of economic cooperation, growth and solidarity.

These objectives should be anchored in the treaties of the European Union, urges the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in its own-initiative opinion on [Lessons learned for avoiding the severity of austerity policies in the EU](#), which was presented and adopted at the EESC plenary session on Wednesday.

**Future crisis management must be more sustainable and in line with EU objectives**

“In future, the EU institutions should be solely responsible for developing and implementing the necessary adjustment programmes in the EU, even if partnerships with external institutions are established”, said rapporteur **José Leirião** (Various Interests). “This is of utmost importance as they have to be in line with our common values and objectives and avoid the inconsistencies and shortcomings that have arisen in the past.”

By taking over the leadership of future adjustment programmes, the EU institutions should ensure that the social partners and representatives of civil society are involved on an equal footing with the EU institutions, the European Central Bank and other bodies in the setting-up, periodic monitoring and assessment of these programmes.

The EESC opinion makes further proposals to improve EU crisis management. It suggests to the European Commission that the following be created:

- a European Credit Rating Agency;
- an independent international body to evaluate the credibility and impartiality of the adequacy evaluations conducted.

Based on the experience of the most recent crisis, the Committee welcomes the aims of the Commission to reform the euro in key aspects by abandoning austerity policies and deepening the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU). The EESC considers that a reformed and completed EMU will make the EU more resistant to asymmetric shocks and help prevent future crises.

### **Negative effects of austerity must be offset to prevent future crises**

The EESC urges the Commission to design **supplementary programmes for the economic and social recovery** of countries which were/are subject to austerity. These programmes should be applied at the same time as, or at the end of, an adjustment programme. The European Commission should also develop a European strategy to eradicate poverty.

Although the impact of austerity measures differs between countries, dramatic consequences for cohesion and inclusion policies have arisen all too often, causing amongst other things negative GDP growth, increasing unemployment and public deficits, and decreasing public investment and social protection.

The rapporteur, **José Leirião**, suggested the setting up of: “specific funds for job creation in sectors such as science, engineering and health which have been hit hard by the brain drain. We believe that these funds could help encourage migrants to return and build up their country’s competitiveness”.

In view of current and upcoming labour market challenges, the EESC believes that the Commission should propose measures to tackle, on an EU level and in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights, the increase in poverty and to preserve social protection. Member States should consider introducing a common *universal, basic unemployment insurance scheme* and a *minimum living income*.

Finally, the Committee calls on the Commission to follow up on the conclusions of the High Level Group on the mutualisation of debt and euro debt securities.

### **Background:**

The opinion is based on fact-finding missions to Portugal, Greece and Ireland, which gathered in-depth, first-hand information about local experience of crisis management and adjustment programmes and their impact, while it also builds on the conclusions of a public hearing involving the European Commission, the European Central Bank, the International Monetary Fund and representatives of civil society organisations. The programmes have led to severe socio-economic problems in these countries and have affected the poorest people the most, reducing their access to the basic necessities. The statistical data and reports of the missions can be found in the

## **Daily News 16 / 02 / 2018**

### **President Juncker attends the Munich Security Conference**

President **Juncker** will participate tomorrow in the [Munich Security Conference](#), together with First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans**, Commissioners Johannes **Hahn**, Elżbieta **Bieńkowska**, and Julian **King**. The President will deliver a speech in which he will present further steps to promote Europe as a strong global actor on security and defence. He will use this opportunity to show progress on the delivery of the European Defence Fund, including with the unveiling of a further set of EU-funded defence research projects. These projects will be signed in the coming weeks and aim at supporting maritime surveillance and interdiction missions at sea, as well as at improving soldiers' equipment. The European Defence Fund, [launched](#) by President **Juncker** in June 2017, is a catalyst for the creation of a strong EU defence industry. It boosts defence capabilities and builds new partnerships across borders. More information on the EU-funded projects in our [press release](#). The speech can be followed live [here](#) from 10.30 CET. The agenda of the Vice-President and the Commissioners can be found [here](#). *(For more information: Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 229 91382; Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maud Noyon – Tel. +32 229-80379)*

### **State aid: Commission approves Belgian certificates schemes for renewable electricity and high-efficiency cogeneration in Flanders**

The European Commission has concluded the certificates schemes for renewable electricity and high-efficiency cogeneration implemented in Flanders (Belgium) to be in line with EU State aid rules. Under the green certificates scheme, renewable electricity producers receive one green certificate for each MWh they generate. Under the combined heat and power (CHP) certificates scheme, high-efficiency cogeneration installations receive one certificate for each MWh of energy saving they realise. The Commission assessed the compatibility of the two schemes under EU State aid rules, in particular the provisions of the [2014 Guidelines on State Aid for Environmental Protection and Energy](#). It concluded that the two certificates schemes will support the production of electricity from renewable energy sources and high-efficiency cogeneration, in line with EU environmental objectives, while any distortion of competition caused by the public support is minimised. The two schemes will help Belgium to meet its 2020 target of producing 13% of its energy needs from renewable sources. A full press release is available online in [EN](#), [FR](#), [DE](#) and [NL](#). *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Yizhou Ren – Tel.: +32 229 94889)*

### **Mergers: Commission opens in-depth investigation into proposed merger between Praxair and Linde**

The European Commission has opened an in-depth investigation to assess the proposed merger between Praxair and Linde under the EU Merger Regulation. The Commission is concerned that the merger may reduce competition in the supply of several crucial gases, like oxygen and helium. Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager**, responsible for competition policy, said: *“Gases – like oxygen and helium – are crucial inputs for a large variety of products we use every day. Manufacturers need to buy these gases from a small number of suppliers. We will carefully assess whether the proposed merger between Praxair and Linde would lead to higher prices or less choice for European consumers and businesses.”* Praxair and Linde are two of the four largest companies active worldwide across the whole supply chains of industrial, medical and speciality gases. At this stage, the Commission is concerned that the proposed transaction would reduce the competitive pressure in markets covering a significant part of the activities of Praxair and Linde. In particular, the Commission is concerned that there is a risk of price increases due to the increased market power of the merged entity, or the increased likelihood of coordination between the remaining players in the markets. The Commission will now carry out an in-depth investigation into the effects of this transaction to further explore its initial concerns. A full press release is available online in [EN](#), [FR](#) and [DE](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Yizhou Ren – Tel.: +32 229 94889)

#### **Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Impello by Shell**

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of Impello Limited by the Shell Petroleum Company, both of the UK. Impello is an independent energy supplier to household customers in the UK and Germany, active under the brand First Utility. Shell Petroleum, which is part of the Shell group of companies, is active in the energy and petrochemical sectors. Among other things, the Shell group has activities in the trading and wholesale supply of electricity and gas, including in the UK and Germany. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns because of the limited positions of the companies on the markets for the wholesale and retail supply of electricity, as well as gas in the UK and Germany. 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.8775](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Yizhou Ren – Tel.: +32 229 94889)

#### **Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Bake & Co by Dr. Oetker**

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of Bake & Co of Belgium by Dr. Oetker of Germany. Bake & Co supplies frozen bakery products sold as ‘bake-off’ to retail and food service customers. Dr. Oetker is active in the supply of food products, alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, specialty phosphates, hotel accommodation, as well as logistical, financial and hosting services. The companies’ activities overlap in the supply of frozen cakes, breakfast pastry and rolls, and savoury snacks sold as bake-off in several countries in the European Economic

Area. However, the Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns because the companies' combined positions in overlapping 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 case number [M.8748](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Yizhou Ren – Tel.: +32 229 94889)

### **Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Fedrigoni by Bain Capital**

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the proposed acquisition of Fedrigoni of Italy by Bain Capital of the US. Fedrigoni is active in the production and sale of various types of paper, including graphic or fine paper, security paper and solutions (such as paper for banknotes and traded securities and security elements), self-adhesive label stock and stationery. Bain Capital is a private equity investment firm that invests in companies across a number of industries, including information technology, healthcare, retail and consumer products, communications, financial services and manufacturing. The Commission concluded that the proposed transaction would raise no competition concerns as there are no overlaps between the companies' activities. 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.8804](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Yizhou Ren – Tel.: +32 229 94889)

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **Future of EU finances – Commissioner Oettinger visits Germany**

Commissioner Günther H. **Oettinger**, in charge of Budget and Human Resources, is visiting Germany on 19 February as part of his tour across EU Member States (#MFFtour27) aimed at gathering views on the future of EU finances and the EU's multiannual budget post-2020 (#EUBudget). In Germany, the Commissioner will meet with Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel. He is also giving a keynote speech on the Global Business Strategy Day of the Handelsblatt. Commissioner Oettinger is also meeting the President of the Bundestag, Mr Wolfgang Schäuble and the Chairman of the Committee for the Affairs of the European Union of the Bundestag, Mr Gunther Krichbaum. The Commission kicked off this debate on 28 June 2017 with the publication of its [Reflection paper on the future of EU finances](#), available in all EU languages (also in [German](#)). Stakeholders' views will be taken into account when preparing the next MFF, to be presented in [May 2018](#). See a speech "[A Budget Matching our Ambitions](#)" given by Commissioner Günther H. **Oettinger** at the conference "[Shaping our Future](#)" on 8 January 2018. (For more information: Tove Ernst – Tel.: +32 229 86764; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

### **Renewable energy: EU has cost-effective potential to use more renewables**

On Monday 19 February, Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy Miguel **Arias Cañete** and the Director-General of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) Adnan Amin will [launch in Brussels a new report on renewable](#)

[energy prospects in the European Union](#). Prepared by the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), the report identifies cost-effective renewable energy options across all EU countries, sectors, and technologies, in order to meet – and even exceed – the proposed 27% renewables target for 2030. It also provides an open platform for EU countries to assess the impacts of their national renewable energy plans at an EU level, provides insights into the environmental and economic impacts of further deployment of renewables in the EU, and highlights the role that renewables could play in the long-term decarbonisation of the European energy system. The report also shows that all individual Member States have the potential to deploy more renewables cost effectively, especially by generating more solar and wind energy. Moreover, in the heating and cooling sector, which accounts for about half of the EU's energy demand, more than two thirds of the renewables options identified in the report are cheaper than the conventional alternative. The report makes a number of recommendations aimed at helping the EU decarbonise its economy and limit global warming to well below 2°, in line with the [Paris Agreement](#), as well as bringing substantial health benefits for citizens. In its "[Clean Energy for All Europeans](#)" package the Commission made proposals to stimulate investment in the clean energy transition by [putting energy efficiency first](#), [achieving global leadership in renewable energies](#) and [providing a fair deal for consumers](#). (For more information: Anna-Kaisa Itkonen – Tel.: +32 229 5618; Aikaterini Apostola – Tel. +32 229 87624)

### **Commissioner Navracsics to debate new European Agenda for Culture with stakeholders**

On Monday, 19 February, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Tibor **Navracsics**, will discuss plans for a renewed [European Agenda for Culture](#) with stakeholders. This event, hosted by the European Commission, will be an opportunity to bring together 70 important organisations from across the cultural sector including UNESCO, the Council of Europe and Europa Nostra, to hear their views on what a new and ambitious Cultural Agenda should look like and how it could be implemented. The consultation meeting will reflect on the implementation and achievements of the current Agenda for Culture and consider what might be improved in light of societal and technological changes. This new European Agenda for Culture is one of the deliverables of the Communication on "[Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture](#)", the European Commission's input to the Leaders' Summit in Gothenburg in November 2017. Building on this political momentum from the discussion on education and culture in [Gothenburg](#) and the December 2017 European Council meeting, the Commission will develop a new, ambitious and innovative Cultural Agenda with an emphasis on promoting a European identity through culture and values. The proposal for the New European Agenda for Culture will be presented in the spring. (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Joseph Waldstein – Tel.: +32 229 56184)

### [Calendar](#)

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

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## [Mergers: Commission opens in-depth investigation into proposed merger between Praxair and Linde](#)

Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager**, responsible for competition policy, said: *“Gases – like oxygen and helium – are crucial inputs for a large variety of products we use every day. Manufacturers need to buy these gases from a small number of suppliers. We will carefully assess whether the proposed merger between Praxair and Linde would lead to higher prices or less choice for European consumers and businesses.”*

Praxair and Linde are two of the four largest companies active worldwide across the whole supply chains of industrial, medical and speciality gases. For example, they both supply carbon dioxide, which is widely used in the carbonated drinks industry and oxygen, which has a wide variety of uses from steel production to medical oxygen in hospitals and patient homes. They also supply helium, a gas that is necessary for the proper functioning of Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scanners.

The transaction would reduce the number of major players active worldwide and in Europe for the supply of these and many other gases to just three. Other players in the market only have regional, national or local presence and lack the technical and financial capabilities to compete on an equal footing.

In addition, there is no indication that competition could be fostered by new entrants, due to the very high investment necessary to establish a meaningful position in the market.

### **The Commission’s preliminary competition concerns**

At this stage, the Commission is concerned that the proposed transaction would reduce the competitive pressure in markets covering a significant part of the activities of Praxair and Linde. In particular, the Commission is concerned that there is a risk of price increases due to the increased market power of the merged entity, or the increased likelihood of coordination between the remaining players in the markets.

In particular, the Commission’s initial market investigation raised competition concerns for the supply of industrial gases, medical gases (and related services), speciality gases, as well as the supply of helium.

The market investigation confirmed that only the four main players have the engineering capabilities necessary to bid for the largest tonnage projects (i.e. the construction of dedicated gas production units on customer manufacturing sites). It also confirmed that only they have the necessary access to sources of helium worldwide to be competitive. Customers fear that

the reduction of the major players from four to three would significantly deteriorate their ability to obtain critical inputs and products at competitive prices.

The Commission will now carry out an in-depth investigation into the effects of this transaction to further explore its initial concerns.

The transaction was notified to the Commission on 12 January 2018. The Parties have decided not to submit commitments to address the Commission's preliminary concerns. The Commission now has 90 working days, until 4 July 2018, to take a decision. The opening of an in-depth investigation does not preclude the outcome of the investigation.

### **Companies and products**

**Linde**, headquartered in Germany, is active worldwide in the supply of industrial gases, medical gases, speciality gases and related services, including engineering.

**Praxair**, headquartered in the United States, is active in the supply of industrial gases, medical gases, speciality gases and related services, as well as surface-coating technologies. It has operations in North and South America, Asia and Europe.

### **Merger control rules and procedures**

The Commission has the duty to assess mergers and acquisitions involving companies with a turnover above certain thresholds (see Article 1 of the Merger Regulation) and to prevent concentrations that would significantly impede effective competition in the European Economic Area or any substantial part of it.

The vast majority of notified mergers do not pose competition problems and are cleared after a routine review. From the moment a transaction is notified, the Commission generally has 25 working days to decide whether to grant approval (Phase I) or to start an in-depth investigation (Phase II).

In addition to the current transaction, there are 5 ongoing Phase II merger investigations: the [proposed acquisition of Cristal by Tronox](#), the proposed acquisition of [Ilva by ArcelorMittal](#), the [proposed merger of Essilor and Luxottica](#), the [proposed acquisition of Monsanto by Bayer](#), and the [proposed creation of a joint venture by Celanese and Blackstone](#).

More information will be available on the [competition](#) website, in the Commission's [public case register](#) under the case number [M.8480](#).