

Press Release: Auditors examine modernisation programme for European air traffic management

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Second Brussels Conference “Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region” kicks off today

Today 24 and tomorrow 25 April the EU is hosting the [second Brussels Conference “Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region”](#) (#SyriaConf2018), co-chaired together with the United Nations. Ahead of the main ministerial plenary sessions tomorrow, High Representative/Vice-President Federica **Mogherini** will meet today with UN Special Envoy for Syria, Staffan de Mistura. They will have an exchange with representatives from the Syrian civil society and will hold a joint press point at 13:00 (live on [EbS](#)). This morning, Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes **Hahn** and Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos **Stylianides** are participating, together with UN representatives and key donors to the high-level “Day of Dialogue” with over 200 NGOs from Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey. Various aspects of the international support in response to the Syrian conflict in both Syria and the region will be discussed. The introductory remarks by [Commissioner Hahn](#) and [Stylianides](#) are available online. Commissioner **Stylianides** is also participating in a specific event dedicated to education co-organised with the Malala Fund and Sarah Brown, President of “Their world”. More information on today’s events are available [here](#) (focus on resilience and regional/development) and [here](#) (focus on humanitarian support). Conclusions and recommendations will then be reported to tomorrow’s Ministerial Conference. Tomorrow, the ministerial plenary sessions will bring together representatives from over 85 delegations, from the EU and the region, regional and international organisation, NGOs and civil society. Delegations will start arriving from 7.30. The morning plenary session meeting with a political focus will be co-chaired by HR/VP **Mogherini** and followed by a joint EU-UN press conference at around 12:45. The plenary sessions dedicated to the regional and humanitarian aspects of the Syrian conflict will be respectively chaired by Commissioners **Hahn** and **Stylianides**, as well will be parallel sessions tackling economic and humanitarian issues. The pledge announcement will conclude the Conference at around 18:00. The opening of the plenary and parallel sessions as well as the pledge will be live streamed. Videos and photos will be available on [EbS](#). For more information on the Conference, visit the dedicated [website](#) – which contains

the [media advisory](#), the [indicative programme](#) and [background information](#). For further insight into the EU response to the Syrian crisis, read also our [factsheet](#). (for more information: Maja Kocijancic – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Carlos Martin Ruiz De Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Lauranne Devillé – Tel.: +32 229 80833; Alceo Smerilli – Tel.: +32229 64887; Daniel Puglisi – Tel.: +32 229 69140)

Substances dangereuses: l'Agence européenne pour la sécurité et la santé au travail lance une campagne de sensibilisation à l'échelle européenne

[L'Agence européenne pour la sécurité et la santé au travail \(EU-OSHA\)](#) a lancé sa campagne paneuropéenne en faveur de «[Lieux de travail sains](#), [consacrée pour 2018-2019 au thème «Maîtriser l'usage des substances dangereuses»](#). Ce lancement marque le début de 2 ans d'événements et d'activités visant à attirer l'attention sur cette question et à promouvoir les meilleurs moyens de lutter contre les risques que les substances dangereuses font courir aux travailleurs. Contrairement à une opinion répandue, l'utilisation de substances dangereuses n'est pas en recul dans l'Union européenne (UE), et la gestion des risques qu'elles représentent reste une impérieuse nécessité. Les agents cancérigènes font partie des substances auxquelles les travailleurs sont le plus souvent exposés. La [Commission européenne a récemment proposé de limiter l'exposition des travailleurs à cinq agents chimiques cancérigènes](#), en plus des 21 substances qui font déjà l'objet d'une limitation ou d'une proposition de limitation. La commissaire européenne pour l'emploi, les affaires sociales, les compétences et la mobilité des travailleurs, Marianne Thyssen, s'est exprimée en ces termes lors d'une conférence de presse organisée à Bruxelles pour marquer le lancement de la campagne: «*La Commission poursuivra ses actions de sensibilisation et continuera de prendre des mesures afin de limiter l'exposition des travailleurs aux agents chimiques cancérigènes. Il s'agit d'une priorité essentielle pour la Commission européenne, d'autant plus que le socle européen des droits sociaux confère aux travailleurs le droit à un niveau élevé de sécurité et de protection de la santé au travail. À l'avant-garde de la diffusion d'informations sur les lieux de travail dans toute l'Europe, les campagnes de l'EU-OSHA aident les organisations à adopter des solutions efficaces pour gérer la santé et la sécurité au travail en se dotant des outils nécessaires.*» La campagne rassemble un grand nombre de partenaires, dont le réseau des [points focaux](#) nationaux de l'EU-OSHA, des [partenaires de campagne officiels](#), des [partenaires des médias](#) ainsi que le [réseau Entreprise Europe](#), qui intervient dans la diffusion des messages de la campagne auprès des microentreprises et des PME. Le mardi 24 avril à 12h, la Commissaire Thyssen donnera une déclaration presse à l'occasion du lancement de la campagne, avec le Ministre-adjoint pour l'Emploi et les Affaires sociales de la Bulgarie, Mr Lazar Lazarov et la Directrice de l'Agence EU-OSHA, Mme Christa Sedlatschek. La déclaration presse sera diffusée [ici](#). Plus d'informations sont disponibles dans ce [communiqué de presse](#) et sur le [site web de la campagne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Christian Wigand– Tel.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: + 32 229 67094)

Le Plan Juncker soutient des projets environnementaux et des PME en Espagne et en France

Le Groupe de la Banque européenne d'investissement (BEI) a signé deux nouveaux accords en Espagne et en France avec le soutien du Fonds européen pour les investissements stratégiques du Plan Juncker. Le groupe BEI fournit à la banque espagnole BBVA une garantie de 98 millions d'euros permettant à la banque de prêter 600 millions d'euros aux petites entreprises. En France, la BEI a signé un accord de prêt de 76 millions d'euros avec le SIAH (Syndicat Intercommunal pour l'Aménagement Hydraulique) pour la construction d'une usine de traitement d'eau dans le Val d'Oise bénéficiant à 500 000 habitants. Karmenu Vella, Commissaire à l'Environnement, aux Affaires maritimes et à la Pêche a déclaré à ce propos: «*Ce projet innovant de traitement des eaux usées est remarquable à plus d'un titre: améliorer la qualité de l'eau, produire moins de boues d'épuration et les utiliser pour produire de l'énergie. C'est un exemple concret du concept d'économie circulaire au service de l'environnement et des citoyens. C'est aussi la démonstration de l'action locale et concrète du Fonds européen pour les investissements stratégiques, lancé conjointement par la BEI et la Commission européenne.* » (Les communiqués de presse sont disponibles [ici](#). Pour plus d'informations: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Enda McNamara – Tel.: +32 229 64976)

€50 million for micro-enterprises in Italy as UniCredit launches new Social Impact Banking Initiative

The [European Investment Fund \(EIF\)](#) and UniCredit have signed a microfinance guarantee agreement in Italy under the [EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation](#) (EaSI). This new EU guarantee agreement allows UniCredit to provide a total of €50 million to 2,500 micro entrepreneurs in Italy. The EaSI guarantee will support the launch of UniCredit's nation-wide Social Impact Banking Initiative (SIBI), a new inclusive finance initiative to improve their microcredit and finance for social enterprises banking model, giving them access to new clients. The deal was made possible by the [European Fund for Strategic Investments \(EFSI\)](#), the central element of the Juncker Plan. Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne Thyssen, said: *“Thanks to EU support, Unicredit will launch a new inclusive finance initiative worth €50 million to support about 2,500 micro-enterprises in Italy. Many of these micro-entrepreneurs face difficulties in accessing credit from traditional banking sources. This new guarantee agreement will make loans easier accessible to them. This shows again that the European Commission, through its Programme for Employment and Social Innovation, is fully committed to boosting employment in Europe and getting more people into jobs, with particular efforts directed towards the most vulnerable people on the labour market.”* The EaSI Guarantee scheme was launched in June 2015 and is funded by the European Commission and managed by the European Investment Fund. Micro-enterprises wishing to apply for a loan under EaSI, can contact UniCredit branches in Italy. A press release with more information will be published [here](#). (For more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: + 32 229 67094)

Consumer financial services: Commission study identifies remaining hurdles

The European Commission has today published [a study on consumer financial services](#) identifying obstacles that consumers continue to face in the EU when

buying investment funds, investment-driven life insurance or private pension. By pointing to the remaining impediments, the study illustrates the role of EU legislation, such as [MIFID II](#), [PRIIPS](#) and the [Insurance Distribution Directive](#), which have recently entered into application as of this year or will soon apply. Specifically, the study finds that while consumers have access to a large and diverse range of products, they face challenges in collecting and comparing information across the board. It also notes that costs for similar products continue to be very different across Member States. The wide-ranging study also shows that seeking advice from non-independent advisors, such as banks and insurers, remains the norm for the average European investor. Lastly, the study underlined that the potential for new distribution models based on FinTech is promising but must be monitored carefully. In this context – and as part of its FinTech Action Plan – the Commission will examine the current landscape of digital interfaces that help individuals find suitable and cost-effective retail investment products across the EU's capital markets. The Commission will organise a public hearing on 29 June 2018 to exchange views on how to further improve the situation. This [study](#) follows previous Commission initiatives, such as its [2015 Green Paper](#) as well as its [2017 Action Plan on Consumer Financial Services](#). It is part of the Commission's wider commitment to make markets work better for consumers as outlined in the [Capital Markets Union \(CMU\)](#) Action Plan. (For more information: Vanessa Mock – Tel.: +32 229 56194; Letizia Lupini – Tel.: +32 229 51958)

Hong Kong and Macao: 2017 annual reports

The European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy today adopted their annual reports to the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers on political and economic developments [in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region](#) (SAR) and [in the Macao Special Administrative Region](#). The reports emphasise the EU's adherence to its 'one China' policy and support to the 'one country, two systems' principle and its implementation in both Hong Kong and in Macao. As regards Macao, "*in 2017, the 'one country, two systems' principle continued to be implemented, to the benefit of the Macao SAR, China as a whole and the international community. The fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens were generally respected. Macao's media were able to express a broad range of views despite increasing self-censorship.*" The report for the [Hong Kong SAR](#) notes a number of events which contributed to "*an eventful and politically challenging year [...] for the functioning of the 'one country, two systems' principle.*" Despite the 'one country, two systems' principle having worked well in general, the report notes that "*there are legitimate questions about its implementation, leading potentially to its gradual erosion, and Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy in the long term.*" The reports also detail the state of EU-Hong Kong and EU-Macao trade and economic relations, as well as conclusions on the state of democracy, the rule of law and fundamental freedoms in the two SARs. Full press releases are available online ([Macao SAR](#); [Hong Kong SAR](#)) as are the full reports ([Macao SAR](#); [Hong Kong SAR](#)). For more information, visit the [website of the European Union Office to Hong Kong and Macao](#). (For more information: Maja Kocijancic – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Adam Kaznowski – Tel.: +32 229 89359).

State aid: Commission clears Ireland's sugar sweetened drinks tax

The European Commission has concluded that Ireland's sugar sweetened drinks tax does not involve State aid. The Irish tax will apply to soft drinks, i.e. water- and juice-based beverages containing added sugar with a sugar content of 5 grams or more. Ireland notified to the Commission its plans to introduce a sugar sweetened drinks tax in February 2018, with the aim of obtaining legal certainty that the measure did not involve any State aid within the meaning of EU rules. The Commission in its assessment found that soft drinks can be treated differently to other sugary products in view of health objectives. On this basis, the Commission concluded that the scope of the Irish sugar sweetened drinks tax and its overall design are consistent with the health objectives pursued, namely tackling obesity and other sugar related diseases, and does not unduly distort competition. A full press release is available online in [EN](#), [GA](#), [FR](#) and [DE](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Yizhou Ren – Tel.: +32 229 94889)

Mergers: Commission fines Altice €125 million for breaching EU rules and controlling PT Portugal before obtaining merger approval

The European Commission has imposed a €124.5 million fine on Altice, the multinational cable and telecommunications company based in the Netherlands, for implementing its acquisition of the Portuguese telecommunications operator PT Portugal before notification or approval by the Commission. EU merger rules require that merging companies notify planned mergers of Union dimension for review by the Commission ("the notification requirement") and do not implement them until cleared by the Commission ("the standstill obligation"). In this decision the Commission confirms its preliminary view that Altice breached the EU Merger Regulation. In particular, the Commission has concluded that: i) certain provisions of the purchase agreement resulted in Altice acquiring the legal right to exercise decisive influence over PT Portugal; ii) in certain cases, Altice actually exercised decisive influence over aspects of PT Portugal's business. Commissioner Margrethe Vestager, in charge of competition policy, said: "*Companies that jump the gun and implement mergers before notification or clearance undermine the effectiveness of our merger control system. This is the system that protects European consumers from any merger that would lead to higher prices or reduced choice. The fine imposed by the Commission on Altice today reflects the seriousness of the infringement and should deter other firms from breaking EU merger control rules*". A full press release is available in [PT](#), [EN](#), [FR](#), [DE](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Sarantopoulou – Tel.: +32 229 13740)

Mergers: Commission opens in-depth investigation into Apple's proposed acquisition of Shazam

The European Commission has opened an in-depth investigation to assess the proposed acquisition of Shazam by Apple under the EU Merger Regulation. The Commission's initial market investigation raised several issues relating to the combination of Shazam's strong market position in the music recognition

apps market and Apple's market position in the music streaming services market. In particular, at this stage, the Commission is concerned that, following the takeover of Shazam, Apple would obtain access to commercially sensitive data about customers of its competitors for the provision of music streaming services in the European Economic Area. Access to such data could allow Apple to directly target its competitors' customers and encourage them to switch to Apple Music. In addition, while at this stage the Commission does not consider Shazam as a key entry point for music streaming services, it will also further investigate whether Apple Music's competitors would be harmed if Apple, after the transaction, were to discontinue referrals from the Shazam app to them. Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said: "*The way people listen to music has changed significantly in recent years, with more and more Europeans using music streaming services. Our investigation aims to ensure that music fans will continue to enjoy attractive music streaming offers and won't face less choice as a result of this proposed merger.*" A full press release is available in [EN](#), [FR](#), [DE](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Sarantopoulou – Tel.: +32 229 13740)

Eurostat: La dette publique en baisse à 86,7% du PIB dans la zone euro

À la fin du quatrième trimestre 2017, le ratio de la dette publique par rapport au PIB s'est établi à 86,7% dans la zone euro (ZE19), contre 88,1% à la fin du troisième trimestre 2017. Dans l'UE28, le ratio a également diminué, passant de 82,4% à 81,6%. Par rapport au quatrième trimestre 2016, le ratio de la dette publique par rapport au PIB a baissé tant dans la zone euro (de 89,0% à 86,7%) que dans l'UE28 (de 83,3% à 81,6%). Un communiqué de presse est disponible [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Annikky Lamp – Tel.: +32 229 56151)

Eurostat: Déficit public désaisonnalisé de la zone euro inchangé à 0,6% du PIB

Au quatrième trimestre 2017, le ratio du déficit public par rapport au PIB, corrigé des variations saisonnières, s'est établi à 0,6% dans la zone euro (ZE19), stable par rapport au troisième trimestre 2017. Dans l'UE28, le ratio du déficit public par rapport au PIB s'est établi à 0,6%, contre 0,7% au trimestre précédent. Ces données sont publiées par Eurostat, l'office statistique de l'Union européenne. Un communiqué de presse est disponible [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Annikky Lamp – Tel.: +32 229 56151)

STATEMENTS

Statement by President Juncker following the attack in Toronto, Canada

Following the attack in Toronto, Canada, President **Juncker** said the following: "*It is with shock and sorrow that I learnt of the tragic attack in*

Toronto on Monday afternoon. I send my deepest condolences to the families and loved ones of the victims, as well as to Prime Minister Trudeau and to all Canadians. We hold a special thought for the heroic first responders whose calm and courage resolved the stand off without a single shot being fired. Their actions undoubtedly saved many more lives and we all owe them a debt of gratitude. The European Union stands with the great city of Toronto and we will put any and all means at the disposal of the Canadian authorities should ever this be needed." The statement is available [here](#). (For more information: Natasha Bertaude – Tel.: +32 229 67456)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Vice-President Dombrovskis in London

Valdis **Dombrovskis**, Vice-President for the Euro and Social Dialogue, also in charge of Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, visits London today. He will meet Philip Hammond, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank of England. They will discuss issues related to financial markets and sustainable finance, including Commission's recent action plan. The Vice-President also gave a [keynote speech](#) this morning on EU financial markets at [City Week](#), an international financial services forum, and will address a stakeholder roundtable on sustainable finance later in the afternoon. (For more information: Vanessa Mock – Tel.: +32 229 56194; Annikky Lamp – Tel.: +32 229 56151; Letizia Lupini – Tel.: +32 229 51958)

Commissioner Crețu in The Hague to discuss the future cohesion policy

Today Commissioner for regional policy Corina **Crețu** is in The Hague, the Netherlands, where she will meet Kajsa Ollongren, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, and Mr Raymond Knops, State Secretary of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. Discussions will focus on cohesion policy beyond 2020. "Cohesion policy helped the Netherlands maintain its leadership in growth and innovation over the last decade," said Commissioner **Crețu**, "Today in The Hague we will discuss how we can further simplify the policy, make it more flexible and better performing, build stronger links with structural reforms and focus on areas where EU spending has a clear added value." The Commissioner and the ministers will also discuss the EU urban policy, as the Netherlands were a key player in bringing forward the [Urban Agenda for the EU](#) during the 2016 Dutch presidency of the Council. (For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615, Sophie Dupin de Saint-Cyr – Tel.: +32 229 56169)

La Commissaire Thyssen au Portugal à l'occasion du 25^{ème} anniversaire de l'Ecole professionnelle d'Aveiro

Le 25 et 26 avril, la Commissaire chargée de l'Emploi, des Affaires sociales, des Compétences et de la Mobilité des travailleurs, Marianne **Thyssen**, se rendra à Aveiro, au Portugal, afin d'y participer aux célébrations à l'occasion du 25^{ème} anniversaire [d'AEVA-EPA, l'école professionnelle de la](#)

région. AEVA-EPA est la plus grande école professionnelle du Portugal, et est soutenue par le Fonds social européen. Cette visite sera également l'occasion pour la Commissaire Thyssen de visiter d'autres projets se focalisant sur les compétences, la formation professionnelles et l'inclusion sociale, et qui sont financés par les fonds européens. Un exemple est le 'VougaPark', un centre d'innovation qui met à l'avant l'emploi dans une région peu peuplée. La Commissaire visitera également le restaurant 'Torreao', un projet d'inclusion sociale embauchant les sans-abri et les personnes à risque d'exclusion sociale. (Pour plus d'informations: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: + 32 229 67094)

Commissioner Vella at Seafood Expo Global to discuss with stakeholders the future and the social dimension of fisheries, 25 April

Commissioner Karmenu Vella will attend the annual Seafood Exhibition Global in Brussels to meet with businesses and visit Member States' stands promoting the local and regional fisheries industry. The Seafood Global exhibition is the world's largest seafood trade fair and brings together as many as 1.600 exhibitors from over 70 countries. The Commissioner will participate in two panels: on the future of sustainable fisheries and aquaculture at a EU and global scale, and on the social dimension on fisheries. Representatives from the industry, international organisations and non-governmental organisations including the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, the International Labour Organization and Europêche will exchange views on the future of fisheries, the working conditions, security and training for the fishing industry. During the event, the special report "Food from the Oceans" will be presented and seafood companies will be called to join the global movement of the Our Ocean conference, hosted last year by the European Union. More on the event here. (For more information: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: + 32 229 56172; Iris Petsa – Tel.: +32 229 93321)

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

Statement by President Juncker following the attack in Toronto, Canada

It is with shock and sorrow that I learnt of the tragic attack in Toronto on Monday afternoon. I send my deepest condolences to the families and loved ones of the victims, as well as to Prime Minister Trudeau and to all Canadians.

We hold a special thought for the heroic first responders whose calm and courage resolved the stand off without a single shot being fired. Their actions undoubtedly saved many more lives and we all owe them a debt of

gratitude.

The European Union stands with the great city of Toronto and we will put any and all means at the disposal of the Canadian authorities should ever this be needed.

Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR): 2017 Annual Report

The EU adheres to its 'one China' policy and supports the 'one country, two systems' principle and its implementation.

Trade, economic and cultural relations between the European Union and Hong Kong have continued to grow. As in previous years, [the European Union was Hong Kong's second largest trading partner](#) after mainland China, while Hong Kong was the EU's 14th largest trading partner in goods and a key partner for trade in services. With more than 2,100 EU companies based in Hong Kong, the EU remains the largest foreign business constituency in the city. The EU is looking forward to further strengthening and expanding its relations with the Hong Kong SAR.

The rule of law, a transparent regulatory framework, very low levels of corruption and crime, along with an efficient public administration and an independent judiciary, contributed to preserving and fostering the favourable investment climate that lies at the heart of Hong Kong's success.

2017 marked the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the Hong Kong SAR. It was an eventful and politically challenging year for the Hong Kong SAR and for the functioning of the 'one country, two systems' principle. The year was marked by the election of the Chief Executive; the visit of President Xi Jinping; the disqualification of a further four pro-democracy lawmakers; the controversial railway co-location agreement, under which an area of the new Hong Kong-mainland railway station will be leased to mainland China for one-stop clearance procedures, including the decision by the National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) to approve the latter, raising questions amongst Hong Kong's legal community regarding its legal basis; and dozens of judicial cases with political overtones.

Despite some challenges, the report concludes that overall the 'one country, two systems' principle worked well. However, there are legitimate questions about its implementation, leading potentially to its gradual erosion, and Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy in the long term.

The rule of law prevailed and the judiciary continued to demonstrate its independence and consistent respect for due process.

Free speech and freedom of information were generally respected. Self-censorship in the media continues, however, recent developments have also prompted questions regarding possible restrictions to the freedom of expression and free exercise of political rights.

It would be important that the Hong Kong SAR and China's central government resume electoral reform in line with the Basic Law, to reach agreement on an electoral system that is democratic, fair, open, and transparent. Universal suffrage would give the government greater public support and legitimacy in its efforts to meet Hong Kong's economic objectives and tackle socioeconomic challenges. As mentioned in the [Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy's statement of 29 January 2018](#), "*The protection of civil and political rights in Hong Kong is an essential part of the implementation of the 'one country, two systems' principle, which the EU supports*".

For More information

[20th Annual Report of the European Commission and the European External Action Service on political and economic developments in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in 2017](#)

[Website of the European Union Office to Hong Kong and Macao](#)

Youth Development Commission convenes first meeting (with photo)

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung, chaired the first meeting of the Youth Development Commission (YDC) today (April 24). At the meeting, members were briefed on the findings and recommendations of the "Youth Development Strategy for Hong Kong: Public Engagement Report" published by the former Commission on Youth. Members also considered initially the challenges of youth development in Hong Kong and the future work priorities of the YDC.

Members took note of the analysis done by relevant bureau directors or their representatives on the challenges of youth development in Hong Kong. They had an initial discussion on the possible topics that the YDC may consider in future, and offered recommendations in relation to the Government's youth development work. Mr Cheung, the Chairman, agreed that members' views would enable the YDC to have more in-depth and thorough considerations when formulating its work plan.

"Non-official members of the YDC are highly representative, including community leaders as well as experts and stakeholders involved in youth development. More than half of them are young members aged 35 or below. During the meeting, they provided valuable opinions to the YDC on various aspects by drawing heavily on their professional knowledge and experience and

sharing their experience from young people's perspective, enabling the commission to understand better the views of young people. Members agreed that the YDC should give effect to its co-ordinating role to enhance cross-bureau and cross-department collaboration. The Commission should also strive to address young people's concerns about education, career pursuit and home ownership and encourage their participation in politics, as well as public policy discussion and debate. They also agreed that priority should be given to issues that straddle different policy areas," Mr Cheung said.

"The Commission discussed and agreed that the future work of the YDC should focus on three broad directions: to study how to assist young people in selecting suitable study pathways, for example through strengthening life planning work, to explore ways to facilitate young people's career development and promote their upward mobility, for example through grasping opportunities arising from the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Bay Area, and to examine how to strengthen communication channels with young people and encourage them to participate in public affairs more actively. The YDC will thoroughly study relevant issues and set priorities having regard to the directions mentioned above," he said.

The meeting also took note of the work to be undertaken by the three Task Forces set up under the YDC. In the light of the policy directions endorsed by the YDC, the Task Force on Youth Exchange and Internship will provide advice on non-local youth exchange and internship programmes, while the Task Force on Youth Development Fund and Programmes will oversee the Youth Development Fund and other youth development programmes and activities. The two Task Forces will also help implement relevant youth programmes. In respect of the Task Force on Youth Outreach and Engagement, it will keep in touch with young people through different channels and means to enable the Government and the YDC to gauge their pulse, understand their views and adopt their suggestions. The three Task Forces will convene their first meetings soon.

