

European Commission marks the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia

Tomorrow, Friday 17 May, marks the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, calling attention to discrimination suffered by the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) community in the EU and around the world. First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans** stated: *"The European Commission will always strongly condemn violence, discrimination, harassment and hate speech on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics. We all have the right to live free from dehumanisation, ill-treatment or even persecution, regardless of how we identify and regardless whom we love, and this right must be resolutely defended if we are all to be equals in society."* Commissioner Věra **Jourová** added: *"The discrimination of the LGBTI community in the EU covers many aspects of life, such as employment, social security and protection, education and health. Public expressions of sexual orientation and gender identity, such as holding hands on the street or sharing a picture on social media, are too often met with biased and hateful remarks or even violence. We have set up a series of actions at EU-level, but Member States play a pivotal role in making these efforts effective. I therefore strongly encourages Member States to maintain and expand their own initiatives."* High Representative / Vice-President Federica **Mogherini** has also issued a declaration on behalf of the European Union today, available [here](#). In March this year, the Commission published its [annual report](#) on the implementation of the List of actions to advance LGBTI equality in 2018, which provides an overview of the ambitious set of measures the Commission is implementing to combat discrimination against LGBTI people. This evening, the European Commission headquarters will be lit up in the colours of the rainbow flag as a beacon of support for the LGBTI community and its allies. This afternoon, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights and around 30 diplomatic missions worldwide are publishing a [joint statement](#) to mark this day. Tomorrow, the Commission is also hosting, under the responsibility of Commissioner Günther **Oettinger**, an event for European Commission staff on the theme "Rainbow networks: How important are they?" On 15 June, Commissioner **Jourová** will be joining the European Commission float at the EuroPride Parade in Vienna. For more information, see the [List of actions](#) and [awareness-raising videos](#) online. (For more information: Christian Wigand– Tel.: +32 229 62253; Katarzyna Kolanko – Tel.: +32 299 63444; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: + 32 229 67094)

Eurogroup and ECOFIN meetings, 16 and 17 May 2019

Commissioners Günther H. **Oettinger**, responsible for Budget and Human Resources and Pierre **Moscovici**, in charge of Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs, will represent the Commission at today's Eurogroup and tomorrow's ECOFIN meetings. In the Eurogroup, ministers will exchange views on the economic situation of the euro area and will discuss the main policy challenges on the basis of the European Commission's [Spring 2019 Economic](#)

[Forecast](#). The Eurogroup will then continue in an inclusive format to follow up on the [December 2018 Euro Summit](#). As part of the ongoing work on the deepening of the Economic and Monetary Union, ministers will discuss the Budgetary Instrument for Competitiveness and Convergence, with a particular emphasis on revenue aspects. Commissioner Pierre **Moscovici** will participate in the press conference following the meeting. At their meeting the next day, EU finance ministers will try to come to an agreement on an update to the EU's excise duty system, including on [specific rules for alcohol](#). Ministers are then expected to debate the reform of the international tax system ahead of the June G20 meetings in Japan. Ministers will also discuss the economic impact of labour mobility, in the presence of Commissioner Marianne **Thyssen**, in charge of Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility. Finally, ministers are expected to adopt conclusions on [in-depth reviews for Member States identified in the Alert Mechanism Report of November 2018](#) and progress with the implementation of the 2018 Country-Specific Recommendations of July 2018. A press conference with Commissioner Günther H. **Oettinger** will follow the meeting. *(For more information: Annika Breidhardt – Tel.: +32 229-56153; Vanessa Mock – Tel.: +32 229 56194; Annikky Lamp – Tel.: +32 229 56151; Enda McNamara – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Patrick McCullough – Tel.: +32 229 87183)*

European Investment Bank approves €350 million in financing under Juncker Plan for Northvolt's battery gigafactory in Sweden

The European Investment Bank (EIB) has given its in-principle agreement to help finance Europe's first home-grown gigafactory for lithium-ion battery cells, *Northvolt Ett*, in Sweden. Once the loan agreement is in place, the financing would be supported by the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), the main pillar of the [Juncker Plan](#). The batteries from *Northvolt Ett* are targeted for use in automotive, grid storage, and industrial and portable applications. Maroš **Šefčovič**, Vice-President for the Energy Union, said: *"The EIB and the Commission are strategic partners under the EU Battery Alliance. I welcome the significant support proposed by the EIB to Northvolt gigafactory as a stepping-stone towards building a competitive, sustainable and innovative value chain, with battery cells manufactured at scale, here, in Europe. Our two institutions are working closely with the industry and key Member States to put the EU on a firm path towards global leadership in this rapidly expanding sector"*. A press release is available [here](#). As of April 2019, the Juncker Plan has mobilised almost €393 billion of additional investment, including €10.7 billion in Sweden. The Plan is currently supporting 945,000 small and medium businesses across Europe. *(For more information: Annika Breidhardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153; Siobhán Millbright – Tel.: +32 229 57361)*

Des jeunes leaders invités à débattre des inégalités lors des Journées européennes du développement

Quinze jeunes leaders internationaux ont été sélectionnés par la Commission européenne pour faire entendre la voix de la jeunesse lors des [Journées européennes du développement](#), le plus important forum sur la coopération internationale et le développement, qui se tiendra à Bruxelles les 18 et 19 juin prochains. Neven **Mimica**, commissaire en charge de la coopération internationale et du développement, a déclaré: « Ces jeunes leaders ont des

compétences et une expertise exceptionnelles et partageront avec nous leurs idées sur la manière dont notre coopération peut aider à réduire les inégalités. Je me réjouis d'entendre leurs points de vue inspirants, car la nouvelle génération aura entre ses mains la clé pour un monde meilleur et plus juste. » Les jeunes leaders, âgés de 21 à 26 ans, ont été choisis parmi 404 candidats issus de 99 pays pour leurs compétences, leur expertise et leur contribution active à la recherche de solutions aux problèmes de développement. Ils partageront leurs visions sur la manière de remédier aux inégalités pour construire un monde qui ne néglige personne – thème principal de l'édition 2019 des Journées européennes du développement. Plus d'informations sur le programme des jeunes leaders sont disponibles [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Carlos Martin Ruiz De Gordejuela – Tél.: +32 229 65322; Elena Gonzalez Verdesoto – Tél.: +32 229 99862)

European Commission launches Blue Economy Report at European Maritime Day in Lisbon

Today, Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Karmenu **Vella** opened the 2019 European Maritime Day conference in Lisbon. This year, the main focus is on boosting a “blue” economy, the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, through entrepreneurship, investment, and research and innovation. On this occasion, the European Commission launches the second edition of its Blue Economy Report. Commissioner **Vella** said: “Coastal regions are home to 214 million people and generate 43% of EU GDP. Today’s report confirms the blue economy’s role as an exciting growth sector, with opportunities both in established sectors like tourism and shipbuilding, and in emerging areas like ocean energy or the blue bioeconomy. Yet we also know that blue economy start-ups and small companies often struggle to get their good ideas off the ground. That is why the European Commission is currently developing an investment-readiness support tool to help them mature and eventually access the funding they need to scale up.” Tibor **Navracsics**, Commissioner for Education, Youth, Culture and Sport, responsible for the Joint Research Centre, instrumental in drafting the Blue Economy Report added: “Though our oceans cover more than 70% of the earth’s surface, we know less about what lies beneath the waves than we do about faraway planets. This prevents us from making the most of our resources while protecting marine ecosystems. The second Report on the European Blue Economy aims to change that. It reflects the importance that the European Commission attaches to a robust, evidence-based approach. Our oceans and seas can help us in tackling the challenges facing humanity; creating prosperity without endangering that of future generations.” Using the opportunities of the oceans sustainably was also at the heart of Commissioner Vella’s speech at today’s international ministerial conference on smart ocean governance, organised by Portugal. He reiterated the key role of oceans – in particular ocean energy – towards achieving a carbon-free Europe by 2050. The [full speech](#) and the [2019 EU Blue Economy Report](#) are available online. More information is available [here](#) on the upcoming release of the IPCC Special Report on Oceans expected in September 2019. (For more information: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: [+32 2 295 61 72](#); Ana Crespo Parrondo – Tel.: [+32 2 298 13 25](#))

Single European Railway Area: better rules on interoperability, noise and

access for persons with reduced mobility

The Commission is today adopting a set of rules addressing rail interoperability, train accessibility for persons with reduced mobility and rail noise. This series of measures completes the preparations for the 'technical pillar' of the [Fourth Railway Package](#), adopted by the European Parliament and the Council in April 2016, and now ready to kick-in on 16 June 2019. The Package will help to complete the Single European Railway Area – the so-called Single Market for rail services – and therefore deliver on this Commission's agenda of [a fairer and deeper internal market](#). Its overarching goal is to revitalise the rail sector and make European railways more innovative and competitive vis-à-vis other modes of transport. Commissioner for Transport Violeta Bulc said: *"Today, we are putting in place a critical pillar of our vision for rail transport, with our citizens at its heart. The Commission has now finalised all preparatory works of the Fourth Railway Package. Member States must now act swiftly and implement the new rules to create a real interoperable rail network that will make rail more attractive, more reliable and competitive and at the same time reduce costs for Europe-wide railway services."* The latest new rules adopted today are essential for improving the accessibility of persons with reduced mobility, but also to counter one of the negative impacts of transport affecting human health: noise. They will also will boost deployment of interoperable train operations and in particular the [European rail traffic management system \(ERTMS\)](#), the basis for digitalising railways and launching automated services, to the benefit of European citizens and industry. It will also significantly reduce the costs and administrative burden by granting the [European Railways Agency \(ERA\)](#) the responsibility for issuing EU vehicle authorisations and certification for operations. Provisions for citizens with reduced mobility will ensure they have better access to information on equipment in all railway stations across Europe. (For more information: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: + 32 229 56172; Stephan Meder – Tel.: +32 229 13917)

Antitrust: Commission fines Barclays, RBS, Citigroup, JPMorgan and MUFG €1.07 billion for participating in foreign exchange spot trading cartel

In two settlement decisions, the European Commission has fined five banks for taking part in two cartels in the Spot Foreign Exchange market for 11 currencies – Euro, British Pound, Japanese Yen, Swiss Franc, US, Canadian, New Zealand and Australian Dollars, and Danish, Swedish and Norwegian crowns. The first decision imposes a total fine of €811 million on Barclays, The Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS), Citigroup and JPMorgan. The second decision imposes a total fine of €258 million on Barclays, RBS and MUFG Bank (formerly Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi). UBS is an addressee of both decisions, but was not fined as it revealed the existence of the cartels to the Commission. Foreign Exchange, or "Forex", refers to the trading of currencies. When companies exchange large amounts of a certain currency against another, they usually do so through a Forex trader. The Commission's investigation revealed that some individual traders in charge of Forex spot trading of these currencies on behalf of the relevant banks exchanged sensitive information and trading plans, and occasionally coordinated their trading strategies through various online professional chatrooms. The information exchanges, following the tacit

understanding reached by the participating traders, enabled them to make informed market decisions on whether to sell or buy the currencies they had in their portfolios and when. Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy said: *"Companies and people depend on banks to exchange money to carry out transactions in foreign countries. Foreign exchange spot trading activities are one of the largest markets in the world, worth billions of euros every day. Today we have fined Barclays, The Royal Bank of Scotland, Citigroup, JPMorgan and MUFG Bank and these cartel decisions send a clear message that the Commission will not tolerate collusive behaviour in any sector of the financial markets. The behaviour of these banks undermined the integrity of the sector at the expense of the European economy and consumers"*. The full press release is available online in [EN](#), [FR](#), [DE](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of NKD Group by TDR Capital

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of sole control of NKD Group of Germany by TDR Capital of the UK. NKD Group is a discount value retailer selling apparel, home textiles and hard goods (such as toys, various electronics devices and lighting products) in Germany, Austria, Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia. TDR Capital is a private equity firm with investments in companies in a variety of sectors, including petrol stations and retail and convenience operations connected with those petrol stations. The Commission concluded that the proposed transaction would raise no competition concerns given the limited horizontal 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.9329](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of joint control over Scout24 by Hellman & Friedman and Blackstone

The European Commission has approved under the Merger Regulation the acquisition of joint control of Scout24 AG of Germany by Hellman & Friedman LLC ("H&F") and the Blackstone Group L.P. ("Blackstone"), both of the US. Scout24 is an online classified advertising portal specialising in the real estate and automotive sectors. H&F and Blackstone are investment management firms controlling a portfolio of companies in various sectors. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, because there is no overlap between the activities of the companies and their market shares on related markets are moderate. 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.9333](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Eurostat : Excédent de 22,5 milliards d'euros du commerce international de biens de la zone euro, excédent de 2,9 milliards d'euros pour l'UE28

Selon les premières estimations publiées par Eurostat, l'office statistique de l'Union européenne, les exportations de biens de la zone euro (ZE19) vers le reste du monde se sont établies à 205,6 milliards d'euros en mars 2019, en hausse de 3,1% par rapport à mars 2018 (199,5 milliards). Les importations depuis le reste du monde ont quant à elles été de 183,1 milliards d'euros, en hausse de 6,0% par rapport à mars 2018 (172,7 milliards). En conséquence, la zone euro a enregistré en mars 2019 un excédent de 22,5 milliards d'euros de son commerce international de biens avec le reste du monde, contre +26,9 milliards d'euros en mars 2018. Le commerce intra-zone euro s'est établi à 172,1 milliards d'euros en mars 2019, soit -0,3% par rapport à mars 2018. Selon les premières estimations, les exportations de biens extra-UE28 se sont établies à 173,4 milliards d'euros en mars 2019, en hausse de 1,2% par rapport à mars 2018 (171,3 milliards). Les importations depuis le reste du monde ont quant à elles été de 170,4 milliards d'euros, en hausse de 6,4% par rapport à mars 2018 (160,1 milliards). En conséquence, l'UE28 a enregistré en mars 2019 un excédent de 2,9 milliards d'euros de son commerce international de biens avec le reste du monde, contre +11,2 milliards en mars 2018. Le commerce intra-UE28 s'est élevé à 317,2 milliards d'euros en mars 2019, soit +2,7% par rapport à mars 2018. Un communiqué de presse est disponible [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Daniel Rosario – Tél.: +32 229 56185; Kinga Malinowska – Tél: +32 229 51383)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Commissaire Stylianides à la Plateforme mondiale pour la réduction des risques de catastrophe à Genève

Christos **Stylianides**, commissaire chargé de l'aide humanitaire et de la gestion de crises, prononcera aujourd'hui une déclaration au nom de l'Union européenne et de ses États membres lors de la [Plateforme mondiale pour la réduction des risques de catastrophe](#), organisée à Genève du 13 au 17 mai. Des représentants de la Commission européenne, du Parlement européen et du Comité des régions participeront aux séances de travail et de haut niveau ainsi qu'aux événements parallèles pour présenter le soutien de l'UE au cadre de Sendai pour la réduction des risques de catastrophe (2015-2030). *“Nous devons répondre aux défis d'aujourd'hui, mais aussi réfléchir aux risques de demain. Les citoyens de ce monde attendent de leurs dirigeants qu'ils agissent, et nous ne pouvons tout simplement pas supporter le coût de l'inaction. L'UE est convaincue que la mise en œuvre d'une politique efficace de prévention des risques de catastrophe est essentielle pour s'adapter aux effets du changement climatique et faire face aux nouveaux risques émergents”*, a déclaré le commissaire **Stylianides**. Durant la Plateforme mondiale, la délégation européenne présentera également des technologies et outils innovants soutenant l'agenda de gestion des risques de catastrophe et la mise en œuvre du cadre de Sendai par les pays de l'UE et d'autres partenaires. (Pour plus d'informations: Carlos Martin Ruiz De Gordejuela – Tél.: +32 229 65322; Daniel Puglisi – Tél.: +32 229 69140)

Commissioner Bieńkowska in Poland to discuss the future of Europe, regional policy and the circular economy

Commissioner Elżbieta **Bieńkowska**, responsible for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, continues a series of Citizens' Dialogues in Poland. Today, the Commissioner will be in Wałbrzych to discuss the future of small and medium cities in Europe with Mr Roman Szełemej, Mayor of Wałbrzych and Mr Rafał Jurkowlaniec, former Marshal of Lower Silesia. Later today, she will travel to Wrocław to host a dialogue with Mr Jacek Sutryk, Mayor of Wrocław, on the opportunities and challenges for Europe, in particular the future scenarios for the Central European region. Tomorrow, 17 May, the Commissioner participates in a Citizens' Dialogue in Częstochowa. Together with Mr Krzysztof Matyjaszczyk, Mayor of Częstochowa, she will focus on the benefits that a circular economy can bring to Europe. In 2015, the Commission adopted the new [Circular Economy Action Plan](#) to stimulate Europe's transition towards a circular economy that will create jobs, boost competitiveness, protect the environment and generate sustainable growth. Three years after the adoption of this Action Plan, all 54 actions were delivered or are being implemented. For example, the Commission put forward an EU-wide [Plastics Strategy](#), revised the [waste legislative framework](#) or revamped the rules on [fertilisers](#). For more information, see the 2019 [report](#) on the implementation of the Circular Economy Action Plan. *(For more information: Lucia Caudet – Tel.: + 32 229 56182; Victoria von Hammerstein – Tel.: +32 229 55040)*

Commissioner Gabriel is in Berlin to discuss about digital transformation, security and trust

Today, Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society Mariya **Gabriel** is in Berlin, Germany, to participate in the [Bosch Connected World](#) event, a conference on the Internet of Things (IoT) and digital transformation, bringing together executives, decision makers, innovators, developers, entrepreneurs, and IoT experts. She will give a keynote speech about the positive impact of various EU digital initiatives on the economy and society. Later in the day, Commissioner **Gabriel** is invited to address the parliamentary committee for the Digital Agenda in the Bundestag. She will underline the importance of bringing industrial stakeholders together to help boosting the trustworthiness and security of [Internet of Things](#) and [Artificial Intelligence](#). For this purpose, in April the High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence issued the "[Ethics Guidelines for Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence](#)", while earlier, in March, the Commission issued a [Recommendation on the security of 5G networks](#), which proposes a common EU approach for the identification of cyber risks and how to address them. At the same time the [European 5G Observatory](#) monitors market developments and preparatory actions taken by industry stakeholders and Member States in the context of 5G roll-out in Europe and beyond. This morning Commissioner **Gabriel** also participated in the launch of the "Digital Trust Forum", a stakeholder effort aimed at enhancing trust for the Internet of Things and Artificial Intelligence. *(For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tél.: +32 229 67083; Johannes Bahrke – Tél.: +32 229 58615; Marietta Grammenou- Tél.: +32 229 83583)*

Commissioner Stylianides welcomes Swedish contribution to rescEU

Tomorrow, Friday 17 May, Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos **Stylianides** will travel to Stockholm, to discuss the involvement of the Swedish civil protection authorities in [rescEU](#), the reinforced European system of response to natural disasters. He will meet Mikael Damberg, Minister for Home Affairs, who will present the Swedish contribution to the rescEU reserve which is currently set up to prepare for the next forest fire season. Commissioner **Stylianides** will also take part in a [Citizens' Dialogue](#) in Gävle, a city which was heavily affected by forest fires in 2018. In the afternoon the Commissioner will visit the Commission's "[EU Saves Lives](#)" travelling exhibition which is currently set up in the Mall of Scandinavia in Stockholm. *(For more information: Carlos Martin Ruiz de Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Daniel Puglisi – Tel.: +32 229 69140)*

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