

EU-U.S. Trade Talks: European Commission presents draft negotiating mandates

The European Commission has today adopted proposals for negotiating directives for trade talks with the United States: one on [conformity assessment](#) to make it easier for companies to prove their products meet technical requirements on both sides of the Atlantic, and one on the [elimination of tariffs for industrial goods](#). The Member States must now give their green light to the proposals before negotiations can begin.

Commissioner for Trade Cecilia **Malmström** said: *"Today's publication of our draft negotiating directives is part of the implementation of the July Joint Statement of Presidents Juncker and Trump. Ambassador Lighthizer and I have already met several times in the Executive Working Group and I have made it very clear that the EU is committed to upholding its side of the agreement reached by the two Presidents. These two proposed negotiating directives will enable the Commission to work on removing tariffs and non-tariff barriers to transatlantic trade in industrial goods, key goals of the July Joint Statement."* As part of its commitment to transparency, the European Commission has published the drafts mandates at the same time as submitting them to the EU Member States. The negotiating directives submitted by the Commission to the Council implement the 25 July [Joint Statement](#) and cover two potential agreements with the U.S.. For more information about the process that led to the today's publication of the proposals, as well as other aspects of the July Statement which the EU has already been implementing, see the full [press release](#) online. (For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel.: +32 229 56185; Kinga Malinowska – Tel: +32 229 51383)

L'Union européenne renforce sa coopération avec la Côte d'Ivoire

L'Union européenne mobilise une enveloppe additionnelle de 35 millions d'euros pour la Côte d'Ivoire en soutien aux réformes et aux politiques de formation professionnelle et de développement économique. Cette annonce a été faite par le commissaire européen pour la coopération internationale et le développement, Neven **Mimica**, à l'occasion de sa rencontre avec Marcel Amon-Tanoh, le ministre des Affaires étrangères de la Côte d'Ivoire, et de la signature de la revue à mi-parcours du [Programme Indicatif National](#). Le commissaire **Mimica** a déclaré: *"Ce financement supplémentaire de 35 millions d'euros témoigne des bons résultats obtenus par la Côte d'Ivoire dans la mise en œuvre de son Programme de Développement. Nous voulons soutenir la poursuite des réformes essentielles au pays, notamment dans les secteurs de la gestion des finances publiques, de l'amélioration du climat pour les entreprises et du commerce. Cet appui s'inscrit pleinement dans la dynamique de [l'Alliance Afrique-Europe pour des investissements et des emplois durables](#)."* Le communiqué de presse complet est disponible [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Carlos Martin Ruiz De Gordejuela – Tél.: +32 229 65322; Christina Wunder – Tél.: +32 229 92256)

State aid: Commission clears Italian liquidity support guarantee for Banca Carige

The European Commission has found Italian plans to support the access to liquidity of Cassa di Risparmio di Genova e Imperia ("Banca Carige") with a state guarantee to be in line with EU State aid rules. In particular, the State aid consists of the Italian State providing a guarantee for a series of bonds that the bank plans to issue. These bonds will have a total nominal amount of up to €3 billion. Banca Carige will pay a fee to the Italian State for the guarantee. The Commission's assessment showed that the measure is targeted, proportionate and limited in time and scope. The Commission has therefore concluded that this liquidity support is in line with EU rules, in particular its [2013 Banking Communication](#). More information will be on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the [public case register](#) under the case numbers SA.52917. *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Giulia Astuti – Tel.: +32 229 553449)*

Mergers: Commission approves BASF's acquisition of Solvay's nylon business, subject to conditions

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the proposed acquisition of Solvay's nylon business by BASF. Today's decision follows an [in-depth review](#) of the proposed transaction, which involves Solvay and BASF, which both manufacture nylon compounds and nylon fibres. Nylon fibres are used in particular for clothing and sportswear. The manufacture of nylon compounds and nylon fibres requires as a key input Adiponitrile ("ADN"), an oil derivative. BASF and Solvay have dominant or strong market positions throughout the nylon value chain, and in particular the value chain of a type of nylon called "nylon 6.6". Following its in-depth market investigation, the Commission identified the following competition concerns with the transaction as originally notified: (i) it would lead to a reduction of the number of suitable suppliers and likely price increases in a number of markets related to the nylon industry in the European Economic Area (EEA); (ii) due to the limited number of suppliers of intermediate products, the merged entity would also have the ability and incentive to restrict its competitors' access to essential inputs including ADN, nylon 6.6 and others in the EEA. To address the Commission's competition concerns, BASF and Solvay offered the following commitments: (a) the divestiture of Solvay's facilities at Belle-Etoile and Valence (France), Gorzow (Poland), and Blanes (Spain) to a single suitable buyer; (b) the creation of a production joint venture in Chalampé (France) between the merged entity and the buyer of the divested assets, for the production of adipic acid; (c) long-term supply agreements for ADN to meet the divestment business' requirements. The commitments fully remove the overlap between BASF and Solvay in the markets where the Commission had identified competition concerns. Therefore, the Commission concluded that the proposed transaction, as modified by the commitments, would no longer raise competition concerns. The decision is conditional upon full compliance with the commitments. Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said: *"Nylon is used in many different types of products, not only textile or carpets but also in car components, to make them lighter and more environmentally friendly. Our decision will allow for*

the creation of a significant European player in this market because the commitments offered by BASF and Solvay *ensure that the merger will not lead to higher prices or less choice for European businesses and, ultimately, consumers.*" The full press release is available online in [EN](#), [FR](#), [DE](#), [NL](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Mergers: Commission clears creation of joint venture between Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group and Akamai

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger regulation, the acquisition of joint control over a newly created joint venture in Japan by Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group, Inc. ("MUFG HD") of Japan and Akamai Technologies, Inc. ("Akamai") of the US. The joint venture will provide a blockchain-based online payment network in Japan. MUFG HD is a holding company for entities engaged in a wide range of financial businesses. Akamai is a company that provides cloud services for delivering, optimising and securing content and business applications over the Internet. The Commission concluded that the proposed transaction would raise no competition concerns because the joint venture has no current or planned 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.9214](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Aides d'État: la Commission approuve le régime français de soutien à l'installation de 300 mégawatts d'énergie solaire en Haut-Rhin

La Commission européenne a autorisé, en vertu des règles de l'UE en matière d'aides d'État, en particulier sur la base de ses [lignes directrices de 2014 concernant les aides d'État à la protection de l'environnement et à l'énergie](#), le régime que la France envisage d'adopter en faveur de nouvelles installations solaires photovoltaïques dans le département du Haut-Rhin. Ce régime a pour but de promouvoir la production d'électricité à partir de sources renouvelables. L'aide prendra la forme d'un contrat d'achat sur 20 ans pour les installations les plus petites, et d'un complément de rémunération, également sur 20 ans, pour les installations de plus grande taille (au-dessus de 500 kW). Le régime est doté d'un budget provisoire maximal de 250 millions d'euros. L'aide sera octroyée par l'État français et contribuera aux objectifs français et européens d'efficacité énergétique et de production d'énergie à partir de sources renouvelables, conformément aux [objectifs environnementaux](#) de l'UE, tandis que les éventuelles distorsions de concurrence engendrées par le soutien de l'État seront réduites au minimum. Plus d'informations sont disponibles sur le site web de la Direction Générale de la [Concurrence](#) de la Commission dans le [registre](#) des aides d'État, sous le numéro SA.51190. (Pour plus d'informations: Ricardo Cardoso – Tél.: +32 229 80100; Giulia Astuti – Tél.: +32 229 553449)

Commission launches online exhibition of outstanding historical European women in the arts and sciences

Today the European Commission [launched](#) an online series of profiles on remarkable historical women in the arts and sciences, who have made important contributions to social, economic and technological domains. The stories of these extraordinary women will be published in [Europeana](#), the EU digital platform for cultural heritage. On this occasion Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, Mariya **Gabriel** said: *"How much better would Europe be if we could offer more opportunities to girls and women across professional fields from art to science? Having role models will help them build these dreams. The online exhibition I launch today in cooperation with Europeana is about pioneering women from our history whose stories are vastly different, but have one thing in common: these fearless women changed the world with their passion and hard work. Today we need to empower and inspire girls and women everywhere in Europe to innovate, discover and create especially in the digital sector. And all of us, we have a role to play".* Every week until International Women's Day in the first week of March, a new story will be released, after which the "Pioneers: Trailblazing women in the arts, sciences and society" [exhibition](#) will be permanently available online on [Europeana](#). The exhibition is part of the Commission's [strategy](#) developed under the initiative of Commissioner **Gabriel** to increase women's participation in the digital economy and to empower them to play a more active role in the digital age. It focuses on progressing in three areas: challenging gender stereotypes in the digital economy, promoting girls' and women's digital skills and education, and advocating for more women entrepreneurs and innovators. (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083 – Marietta Grammenou Tel.: +32 229 83583)

Eurostat: Le prix des logements en hausse de 4,3% dans la zone euro ainsi que dans l'UE (troisième trimestre 2018 comparé au troisième trimestre 2017)

Le prix des logements, tel que mesuré par l'indice des prix des logements, a augmenté de 4,3% tant dans la zone euro que dans l'UE au troisième trimestre 2018 par rapport au même trimestre de l'année précédente. Par rapport au deuxième trimestre 2018, les prix des logements ont progressé au troisième trimestre 2018 de 1,6% dans la zone euro et de 1,5% dans l'UE. Un communiqué Eurostat est à votre disposition [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Lucía Caudet – Tél.: +32 229 56182; Victoria Von Hammerstein – Tél.: +32 229 55040)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Commissioner Navracsics attends official launch of European Capital of Culture Matera 2019 in Italy

Matera in Italy and Plovdiv in Bulgaria are the two [European Capitals of Culture in 2019](#). Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Tibor **Navracsics**, will be in Italy tomorrow (19 January) to take part in the

official opening ceremony for Matera 2019. 2,000 musicians from all the villages of the Basilicata region and many other parts of Europe will perform live over a weekend of celebrations. Commissioner **Navracsics** will deliver a speech and present a plaque and diploma to the Mayor of Matera in recognition of the work invested by the city in preparing the events of 2019.

Commissioner **Navracsics** will also meet Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte for an informal lunch and have a bilateral meeting with Italian Minister of Culture Alberto Bonisoli in the morning. More information on the European Capitals of Culture can be found [here](#). (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Joseph Waldstein – Tel.: +32 229 56184)

Commissioner Thyssen attends launch of the OECD report on the Skills Strategy for Flanders

On Monday, 21 January, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne **Thyssen** will attend the launch of the OECD report on the Flemish Skills Strategy place in Brussels. This project has been realised in cooperation with the European Commission and received co-funding from Erasmus+. At the event, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) will present its conclusions and key messages on the Flemish strategy to invest in people's skills. The overall aim of this event is to underline the importance of skills strategies, which are also a central element in the European Commission's employment and social policy, including under the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) and the Commission's [Skills Agenda for Europe](#). Commissioner **Thyssen** will give a keynote speech focusing on the importance of a whole-of-government approach to skills strategies and the culture of lifelong learning and will be published [here](#). Attendees at the event include Flemish Ministers of Work, Mr Philippe Muyters, and Education, Ms Hilde Crevits, as well as representatives of the Flemish government administration, academics, education providers, trade unions, employer organisations and companies. (For more information: Christian Wigand– Tel.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: +32 229 67094)

Trilateral talks with Russia and Ukraine on the future of gas transit via Ukraine to take place on Monday 21st

The 2nd round of political trilateral talks with Russia and Ukraine on the future of gas transit via Ukraine will take place on Monday 21st January 2019 in Brussels. The meeting will take place with the participation of Vice-President responsible for the Energy Union Maroš **Šefčovič**, Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin and Mr Andriy Kobolyev, CEO of Naftogaz on the Ukrainian side and Energy Minister Alexander Novak and Mr Alexander Medvedev, Deputy Chairman of Gazprom on the Russian side. Vice-President Maroš **Šefčovič** said: "I welcome very much that both sides have agreed to come to Brussels for the second round of negotiations at ministerial level. I welcome also the presence of top representatives of the two incumbent gas companies. Exactly six months have passed since we met in this format for the first time in Berlin. A couple of talks at senior expert level have taken place since then and it is time to take stock of where we are in the process and discuss the

way forward on the key parameters agreed in Berlin. We need a strong commitment by the two sides to advance in the talks, given that the existing transit contract expires at the end of this year." A first ministerial meeting on the topic took place on the 17th of July 2018, followed by meetings at expert during the second half of 2018. Discussions on Monday will build on the expert-level meetings and focus on the key parameters agreed in Berlin, notably the applicable legal framework, volumes, duration and tariffs. The trilateral meeting starts at 3pm, preceded by bilateral meetings between Vice-President **Šefčovič** and each of the Ministers. The meeting will be followed by a press point by the Vice-President at the VIP corner at 5pm transmitted live by [EbS](#). (For more information: Anca Paduraru – Tel: +32 229 91269; Anna-Kaisa Itkonen – Tel: +32 229 56186; Lynn Rietdorf – Tel: +32 229 74959)

Free and fair elections: Commissioner Jourová opens the first meeting of the European cooperation network on elections

On Monday 21 January, Commissioner **Jourová** will open the first European elections network meeting. This is one of the concrete actions to secure [free and fair European elections](#) proposed by President Juncker in his 2018 State of the Union address. Scandals, such as the Facebook/ Cambridge Analytica case, have shown that elections might be influenced by the misuse of personal data during political campaigns. Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, Věra **Jourová** said: *"I want Europeans to be able to make a free decision when casting their vote in May. The threats to elections are now online, national authorities have to be equipped to guarantee fair and secure elections for all citizens. The European elections network will be the place to share intelligence on how to protect the electoral processes."* The European cooperation network will enable authorities to quickly detect potential threats to electoral processes, establish a swift and well-coordinated response to such threats, and encourage common projects and exercises among national networks. The network also supports cooperation with other European level groups and bodies. Member States have appointed a contact point for the European-level cooperation network. While the first focus of the European network will be the upcoming 2019 European elections in May, its broader objective is to support the integrity of all national, regional and local elections in the EU. Up to four meetings will be held in 2019, followed by semi-annual meetings from 2020 onwards. The agenda of the meeting and more details about the European elections network can be found [online](#). (For more information: Christian Wigand– Tel.: +32 229 62253; Mélanie Voin – Tel.: + 32 229 58659)

EU Space Conference: Commission presents its plans for the future of space

On 22 and 23 January the [11th Conference on European Space Policy](#) will take place at the Egmont Palace in Brussels. On Tuesday, Commissioner for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs Elżbieta **Bieńkowska** will open the conference presenting her vision for the future of space in Europe. Space technology, data and services have become indispensable in the daily lives of Europeans. Thanks to major investments, the EU has a strong edge in space activities, and its space industry is one of the most competitive globally. The Commission and the European Investment Bank will present a new report on

“The future of the European space sector”, which assesses the current investment landscape in the space industry, identifies gaps in financing, and formulates recommendations. Also on Tuesday, Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society Mariya **Gabriel** will be a guest speaker at a session on European digital autonomy and the role of satellite communications, digitisation and artificial intelligence in space services. She will present the future development of quantum technologies as the most powerful technology to secure communications with satellites. Vice-President in charge of the Energy Union Maroš **Šefčovič** and Commissioner **Bieńkowska** will open the afternoon session on Europe’s strategic autonomy in the domain of space-related defence and security policies. Space experts from the Commission will be present at a stand, where information material will be available. All speeches will be covered by EbS (schedule will be available [here](#)). Last June the Commission presented a proposal for an [EU Space Programme for the period 2021 to 2027](#), which is now under discussion by the co-legislators. (*For more information: Lucía Caudet – Tel.: +32 229 56182; Victoria Von Hammerstein – Tel.: +32 229 55040*)

[CALENDAR](#): Commissioner’s weekly activities

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