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[EU reaffirms strong commitment to support for Palestine refugees and for Palestine's socio-economic development]()

The funding provided to UNRWA supports the Agency's efforts to ensure the provision of essential services to vulnerable Palestine refugees in the Middle East. This will bring the EU's total contributions to UNRWA in 2018 to €153 million. Moreover, the EU made available an additional €73.3 million to support living conditions in East Jerusalem and strengthen resilience of Palestinians, as well as to promote economic development in all of the occupied Palestinian territory. This brings the EU support to Palestinians to a total of €350 million.

Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, **Johannes Hahn**, said: *"We are confirming our strong commitment to support Palestinians. The EU additional financial support to UNRWA, which is a factor of stability in the region, will allow the Agency to continue to provide essential services to vulnerable Palestine refugees. In parallel, the EU is working with the Agency to intensify fundamental reforms and tackle its recurrent financial deficit. In addition, we are investing in socio-economic development including by moving ahead on the critical project [‘Gaza Central Desalination Plant]()‘ and improving living conditions in East Jerusalem in line with our support to the two-state solution, with Jerusalem as the future capital of both Israel and a future state of Palestine."*

Background

EU support to UNRWA

The EU is the largest contributor to UNRWA. Together with the EU Member States, the EU's contribution for 2016, 2017 and 2018 amounted to €1.2 billion. This underlines the EU's strong commitment to supporting UNRWA's key role in responding to the needs of Palestine refugees for human development and protection in its five areas of operation, i.e. Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The EU is working closely with UNRWA to take forward reform efforts to ensure the provision of basic fundamental services to vulnerable Palestinian refugees. The objective is to secure the continued and sustainable delivery of services to Palestine refugees.

2018 EU support package to Palestinians

EU support to the Palestinians covers a wide range of areas, including humanitarian assistance, capacity building, democratic governance and socio-economic development. In 2018, it amounted to a total of nearly €350 million. The funding is framed by the "European Joint Strategy in Support of Palestine 2017-2020" agreed by the EU Institutions, 22 EU Member States, as well as Norway and Switzerland.

Today's newly adopted €73.3 million assistance package is part of the 2018 support for Palestine and comprises the following programmes:

- "**Support to East Jerusalem programme**" (€12 million) which responds to the deteriorating socio-economic conditions of Palestinians living in the Eastern part of the city and to their decreasing cultural visibility. It will contribute to better education and skills development but also create more job opportunities through private sector support, fostering the overall resilience of the Palestinians. Living conditions are expected to be improved through urban development and housing measures. Finally, investments will target the protection of the Palestinian heritage in East Jerusalem.
- "**Access to self-sufficient water and energy services programme**" (€31.4 million) through which the EU invests in long-term water, energy and sanitation infrastructure across the occupied Palestinian territory with an emphasis on the Gaza Strip, in order to ensure sufficient, equitable, affordable and sustainable access to basic services. A particularly important component of this programme is the allocation of €14.2 million (first tranche of the EU pledge of €77.1 million) for the construction of the Gaza Central Desalination Plant following the successful donor's conference in Brussels on 20 March 2018. The very high population density in Gaza is putting a significant strain on the ailing water infrastructure, which is collapsing because of repeated conflicts, over ten years of Israeli closure, and the intra-Palestinian split. In Gaza, currently 97% of the water is unfit for human consumption.
- "**Support to sustainable economic development and enhanced governance programme**" (€29.9 million) which will promote productive investments in Gaza and enhance economic development in Area C of the West Bank through a better provision of services. Investments in the energy sector intend to enhance its overall efficiency and to encourage the use of renewable energy. Lastly, the programme aims at facilitating democratic improvements, through a strengthened justice system and higher civic participation in electoral processes.

For more information

EU support to Palestine

EU-Palestine relations

[Factsheet – Gaza desalination plant]

[Daily News 20 / 12 / 2018]

Migration and borders: Commission awards additional €305 million to Member States under pressure

This week, the European Commission has made available an additional €305 million in emergency assistance to support migration and border management in Greece, Italy, Cyprus and Croatia. The funding will support efforts to increase reception capacity, protect victims of human trafficking and strengthen border surveillance and management capacity. Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris **Avramopoulos** said: *"The Commission is committed to continue supporting Member States under migratory pressure. The additional €305 million awarded this week to several countries will address urgent needs by ensuring that new arrivals are accommodated adequately and have access to food and water, that the safety and security of the most vulnerable is guaranteed, and that border controls are strengthened where needed."* The emergency funding will be provided under the Commission's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Internal Security Fund (ISF), and is part of the €10.8 billion for migration, border management and internal security already mobilised by the Commission for the period 2014-20. A full [press release] and factsheets on financial assistance to [Greece] and [Italy] are available online. *(For more information: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456 ; Markus Lammert – Tel.: +32 229 58602)*

EU reaffirms strong commitment to support for Palestine refugees and for Palestine's socio-economic development

The EU mobilised €20 million additional financial assistance in support of the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to ensure the provision of essential services to vulnerable Palestine refugees in the Middle East, and €73.3 million to improve the living conditions for the people in East Jerusalem and strengthen their resilience, as well as to promote economic development in all of the [occupied Palestinian territory]. This will bring the EU's total contributions to UNRWA in 2018 to €153 million, and the EU support to Palestinians to a total of €350 million. Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes **Hahn**, said: *"We are confirming our strong commitment to support Palestinians. The EU additional financial support to UNRWA, which is a factor of stability in the region, will allow the Agency to continue to provide essential services to vulnerable Palestine refugees. In parallel, the EU is working with the Agency to intensify fundamental reforms and tackle its recurrent financial deficit. In addition, we are investing in socio-economic development including by moving ahead on the critical project [*'Gaza Central*]

Desalination Plant' and improving living conditions in East Jerusalem in line with our support to the two-state solution, with Jerusalem as the future capital of both Israel and a future state of Palestine." Read the full press release here. *(For more information: Maja Kocijancic – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Alceo Smerilli – Tel.: +32 229 64887)*

Juncker Plan: €360 million support for small and medium businesses in Spain

The **Juncker** Plan has backed an agreement between the European Investment Bank Group and BBVA that will result in €360 million being made available for small and medium-sized businesses in Spain. Facilitating access to finance for these businesses will provide them with the support they need to expand, innovate and create jobs. Vice-President Jyrki **Katainen**, responsible for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness, said: *"The European Fund for Strategic Investments was designed to help facilitate access to finance for small and medium-sized enterprises so that they can take their next steps. I welcome today's agreement which will allow Spanish businesses to access some €360 million in financing to invest in their future growth. They will join over 850,000 other small and medium-sized businesses who are already expected to benefit from the Investment Plan across Europe."* Spain is the fourth largest beneficiary of the Juncker Plan, in relative terms. As of December 2018, the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) at the heart of the **Juncker** Plan has already mobilised €371.2 billion of investment across Europe, including over €46 billion in Spain alone. A full press release is available here. *(For more information: Annika Breidthardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153; Enda McNamara – Tel.: +32 229 64976)*

Security Union: Agreement to crack down on illicit trade in cultural goods

The Commission has welcomed the political agreement reached by the European Parliament and EU Member States on preventing the illicit trade in cultural goods, in particular when it contributes to the financing of terrorism. The agreement is an important step for the Commission's Action Plan to strengthen the fight against terrorism financing. The rules will ensure that Member States can clamp down on the illicit trade in cultural goods when they are exported to the EU from non-EU countries. Provisionally agreed by the Parliament and Council in Strasbourg last week, the new measures were given a formal green light by EU Permanent Representatives at their meeting in Brussels yesterday. Welcoming the political agreement, Pierre **Moscovici**, Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs, said: *"The new rules agreed today will help us combat the illicit trade in cultural goods, which is often used to finance terrorists and organised crime. We cannot accept that terrorists steal cultural goods from vulnerable areas in the world and sell them illegally in order to finance terrorist attacks against European citizens. This is a menace that must be stamped out."* Common EU rules will ensure consistent treatment of imports of cultural goods all along the Union's external borders. This will help prevent illicit cultural goods being brought into the EU and from directly weakening the cultural, historical and archaeological heritage of the country of origin. A press release is online. (*For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Patrick McCullough – Tel.: +32 229 87183*)

La Commission a décidé de prolonger l'équivalence des bourses suisses de six mois

La Commission européenne a décidé aujourd'hui de prolonger de six mois l'équivalence des bourses suisses en conformité avec l'obligation de négociation prévue par le règlement sur les marchés d'instruments financiers. Cette décision, annoncée déjà le 17 décembre et soutenue par tous les États membres de l'UE, expirera le 30 juin 2019. Elle permet aux entreprises et aux marchés de continuer à exercer leurs activités sans discontinuité après le 31 décembre 2018. Dans sa décision de prolonger l'équivalence des bourses suisses, la Commission a tenu compte du résultat des négociations de l'accord-cadre institutionnel, ainsi que de la décision du Conseil fédéral de lancer une consultation sur cet accord qui se déroulera jusqu'au printemps 2019. La Commission suivra de près l'incidence de la mesure d'équivalence, en tenant compte du contexte politique plus large et notamment des progrès en vue de la conclusion de cet accord-cadre institutionnel. Valdis **Dombrovskis**, vice-président de la Commission chargé de la stabilité financière, des services financiers et de l'union des marchés des capitaux, a déclaré: *« Notre objectif reste la signature effective et rapide de l'accord-cadre institutionnel. La prolongation temporaire de l'équivalence devrait donner à la Suisse le temps nécessaire pour mener sa consultation interne sur cet accord. Pendant ce temps, elle offre une continuité aux gestionnaires de portefeuilles et aux courtiers actifs sur le marché des actions suisses et leurs permet d'obtenir des conditions optimales d'exécution pour leurs clients ».* Le système d'équivalence prévu par la législation de l'UE dans le domaine des services financiers encourage la convergence réglementaire à l'échelle internationale et favorise les marchés concurrentiels pour certaines des actions suisses les plus négociées. Il permet aux négociants et aux courtiers européens de se conformer à leurs obligations réglementaires tout en leur donnant la possibilité d'accéder aux meilleures offres pour les investisseurs de l'UE. Les décisions d'équivalence sont toujours fondées sur les caractéristiques propres du pays concerné et il n'existe pas de droit automatique à l'équivalence. Conformément aux règles applicables, la Commission a consulté les États membres de l'UE afin que le projet de décision puisse être adopté et prendre effet avant que la précédente équivalence n'expire à la fin de l'année. *(Pour plus d'informations: Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 229 91382; Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 85615; Letizia Lupini – Tel.: +32 229 51958)*

Joint statement by First Vice-President Timmermans and Commissioner Jourová welcoming the political agreement on a new approach to business insolvency in Europe

First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans** and Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, Věra **Jourová** welcomed the political agreement reached by the European Parliament and EU Member States on a set of European rules on business insolvency: *"Today's agreement on our proposal on insolvency is good news for companies, entrepreneurs and ultimately for investment and* *growth. Every year 200,000 companies go bankrupt throughout the EU, resulting in 1.7 million jobs lost. The introduction of common rules at EU level will make insolvency, restructuring and discharge procedures more efficient, building on those systems that already work well in Member States. It will encourage businesses to restructure early so that value can be better preserved and more jobs saved. It will also give honest entrepreneurs a second chance to start a new business instead of being penalised for failing in their first business attempt. With these new rules, we are also removing barriers for cross-border investment and contributing to building a Capital Markets Union. We want to thank the European Parliament and the Member States for the good cooperation which made it possible to reach an agreement today."* The full statement is available online. *(For more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Markus Lammert – Tel.: +32 229-80423)*

Formation judiciaire européenne: 800 000 professionnels de la justice formés depuis 2011

La Commission européenne publie aujourd'hui son 7ème rapport sur la formation judiciaire européenne qui montre qu'en 2017, 188 000 professionnels de la justice ont été formés au droit européen ou au droit d'un autre Étatmembre que celui dont ils sont originaires. La Commission a ainsi atteint, avec une avance de deux ans, son objectif de former 800 000 professionnels entre 2011 et 2020, soit la moitié des personnes travaillant dans des professions juridiques au sein de l'Union européenne. La commissaire en charge de la justice, des consommateurs et de l'égalité des genres, Věra **Jourová**, a dit: " *De plus en plus de juges et procureurs doivent gérer des affaires impliquant le droit européen*. *Les aider à acquérir ou améliorer leur connaissance en droit européen est très important pour la bonne mise en œuvre des lois européennes. J'encourage les juges, procureurs, avocats et autres professionnels à continuer à se former."* Le rapport montre que la participation à ces formations varie en fonction des pays et des professions – la participation des juges et procureurs est stable, mais celle des personnes travaillant dans les Cours de justice, des avocats et des notaires varie chaque année. En 2019, la Commission publiera son évaluation de la stratégie sur la formation judiciaire lancée en 2011. Le rapport est disponible en ligne. *(For more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Markus Lammert – Tel.: +32 229-80423)*

EU steps up WTO action against China's forced technology transfers

The European Union challenged today in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) the systemic practices that force European companies to give up sensitive technology and know-how as a precondition for doing business in China. This legal action builds up on a case launched by the EU in June 2018. With this move, the EU significantly broadens and deepens the scope of its WTO action against Chinese measures on forced technology transfers. This step is taken in the light of additional findings concerning the incompatibility of the Chinese measures on the approval of investments and the protection of foreign companies' intellectual property rights with the agreed multilateral rules. Commissioner for Trade Cecilia **Malmström** said: "*We cannot tolerate that EU* *companies have to give away valuable technology as a price to pay for investing in China. This clearly goes against the rules that China committed itself to when it joined the WTO. Today, we launch a broader and more systemic legal challenge against this illegal practice, as we believe that it is a major issue affecting European companies doing business in China. This is a matter that can and should be solved within the international, multilateral framework."* The measures challenged today come on top of what the EU had covered in its initial legal action triggered in June 2018. For more information, see EU new and previous consultation requests, as well as the full press release. *(For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel.: +32 229 56185; Kinga Malinowska – Tel.: +32 229 51383)*

L'accord sur les pratiques commerciales déloyales dans la chaîne d'approvisionnement alimentaire protègera l'ensemble des agriculteurs de l'UE

Le Parlement européen, le Conseil et la Commission sont parvenus hier à un accord politique sur un nouvel ensemble de règles qui garantiront, pour tous les agriculteurs de l'UE et une très grande majorité des entreprises agroalimentaires de l'UE, une protection contre les pratiques contraires aux règles commerciales justes et équitables. La nouvelle législation européenne couvre les produits agricoles et les denrées alimentaires commercialisés dans le cadre de la chaîne d'approvisionnement alimentaire et interdit pour la première fois jusqu'à 16 pratiques commerciales déloyales imposées de manière unilatérale par un partenaire commercial. Lors de la réunion de négociation finale avec les représentants du Parlement européen et du Conseil, le commissaire chargé de l'agriculture et du développement, M. Phil **Hogan** a déclaré à ce propos: «*L'accord conclu hier constitue une première en la matière car celle-ci prévoit une protection importante pour l'ensemble des agriculteurs de l'UE, leurs organisations ainsi que les petites et moyennes entreprises. Ils seront désormais protégés contre tous les grands opérateurs agissant de manière déloyale et en marge des règles. J'aimerais exprimer ma gratitude à l'égard de tous les négociateurs, pour leur approche constructive et leur travail soutenu qui ont permis d'aboutir à l'accord politique d'aujourd'hui. Je suis particulièrement heureux du fait que l'accord ait été conclu dans un délai remarquablement court, huit mois seulement après la présentation de la proposition par la Commission.*» L'accord d'aujourd'hui s'appliquera à toute personne intervenant dans la chaîne d'approvisionnement alimentaire dont le chiffre d'affaires maximal est de 350 millions d'euros, avec des niveaux différenciés de protection en-dessous de ce seuil. Les nouvelles règles couvriront les détaillants, les transformateurs de denrées alimentaires, les grossistes, les coopératives ou les organisations de producteurs, ou le producteur isolé qui adopteraient une des pratiques commerciales déloyales recensées. Un communiqué de presse est en ligne. *(Pour plus d'informations: Daniel Rosario – Tél: +32 2 29 56185; Clémence Robin – Tél: +32 229 52 509)*

Environmental data: Commission welcomes agreement on new rules to reduce red tape and increase transparency for citizens

The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union have reached a provisional political agreement on the ambitious new measures to ensure a higher level of transparency in environmental matters and simplify the way in which reports will need to be prepared. Yesterday's agreement is based on the Proposal by the Commission for a Regulation on the alignment of reporting obligations in the field of environment policy that was adopted in May 2018. The new rules will reduce the administrative burden for administration and simplify procedures for businesses involved in reporting and regulatory monitoring. In addition, policymakers will have access to higher quality information to underpin decisions, and citizens will have better access to information on important issues that affect them. European Commissioner for Environment, Fisheries and Maritime Affairs Karmenu **Vella** said: *"By improving the way we collect and share environmental information, we are empowering citizens to find out quickly about industrial emissions or environmental noise, reducing the burden for businesses to provide information and ensuring that administrations at national and EU level work together more effectively. This outcome is a perfect example of the European Commission's Better Regulation Agenda in practice achieving better results more effectively."* The provisional agreement reached yesterday must now be formally approved by the European Parliament and the Council. Following its approval, the new Regulation will be published in the EU's Official Journal and will enter into force after two years. *(For more information: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: + 32 229 56172; Daniela Stoycheva – Tel.: +32 229 53664)*

Promoting innovation: €173 million to help bring top-class projects to market

The Commission will support with a total of €173 million 283 innovative projects to bring their innovations faster to the market. The funding is invested under the pilot phase of the European Innovation Council (EIC), which targets fast-moving and high-risk innovation with strong potential to create new markets. The projects selected in this round include blockchain technologies, a bio-compostable packaging film, single quantum photodetectors and a big data driven personalized knee replacement. The projects will receive funding under the SME Instrument and the Fast Track to Innovation strands of the €2.7 billion pilot of the European Innovation Council, which runs from 2018 to 2020 under the EU research and innovation programme Horizon 2020. To date, the EIC pilot has already supported 1276 projects with €731.15 million. As part of the next research and innovation programme, Horizon Europe, the Commission has proposed to follow up on this pilot phase by establishing a full-scale European Innovation Council that will offer a one-stop shop for high potential and breakthrough technologies, as well as for innovative companies with potential for scaling up. Last week the European Parliament endorsed the proposal for Horizon Europe. The vote by the Parliament complements the recent adoption of the Council's negotiation position and opens the way for the co-legislators to start negotiations. A news item with more details on the projects selected today is available here. *(For more information: Lucía Caudet – Tel. +32 229 56182; Victoria von Hammerstein-Gesmold – Tel.: +32 229 55040)*

Protecting workers against cancer-causing chemicals: new rules adopted on a further 8 chemicals

Workers throughout the EU will soon be better protected against exposure to cancer-causing chemicals. The formal adoption in Council today marks the final step in the legislative process on the Commission's second proposal to broaden the list of recognised cancer-causing chemicals in the workplace. Eight additional cancer-causing chemicals will now be covered by the Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive, including diesel exhaust. European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility Marianne **Thyssen**, welcomed the adoption and said: "*I want a Europe where every worker can come home healthy and safe after each working day. With more than 50% of all work-related deaths, cancer remains the biggest killer in the workplace. The new measures provide better protection for around 20 million workers. This is particularly good news for workers in the chemical, metal and car industry, professional drivers, construction workers and workers in the dock and warehouse sector. It is our duty to continuously update our legislation as science progresses. I therefore call on the European Parliament and Council to also come to a prompt agreement on the Commission's third proposal on an additional 5 cancer-causing chemicals. Our joint efforts are needed to turn the European Pillar of Social Rights into reality, for the people and felt by the people*". More information is available in the MEMO online. *(For more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Andreana Stankova – Tel.: + 32 229 57857)*

Eurobarometer: Consumers trust fish and seafood bought on the EU market

A Eurobarometer survey on the European consumer choices regarding fishery and aquaculture products shows that Europeans like eating fish and other seafood and that the EU policies help building their confidence in this kind of food by reliable and useful consumer information. More than four out of ten Europeans eat fish and seafood at least once a week at home, although price and availability are the main barriers to increase consumption. Regional, national and EU products enjoy a very strong consumer preference. European Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Karmenu **Vella** reacts to the study: "*European consumers tell us they want to have fish on their menu. It is our responsibility, as policy makers, to secure that our citizens can enjoy these tasty products in the long term. This means ensuring the sustainability of our fisheries, and we have progressed a lot on that over the last years. But also aquaculture plays an important role: farmed fish from the EU is a sustainable source of protein and other nutrients. In a low-carbon society, its role will only increase*." The EU is the world's largest market for fishery and aquaculture products. We spend twice the amount of money on fish per capita as US consumers. The study confirms the high level of trust (83%) that consumers have in the information they receive as result of EU regulations. No less than 75% of consumers find the product information clear and easy to understand. While more than a third of European fish consumers prefer wild products (35%), nearly one-third (32%) makes no distinction. Only 9% indicates a strong preference for aquaculture products. These and many more facts in the full survey: Eurobarometer special survey 475: EU consumer habits regarding fishery and aquaculture products. *(For more* *information: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: + 32 229 56172; Daniela Stoycheva – Tel.: +32 229 53664)*

Solidarity with Latvia: €17.7 million of EU funds to support reconstruction works after the floods

Latvia will shortly receive a total amount of €17.7 million of aid from the EU Solidarity Fund (EUSF), following approval of the Commission's proposal by Parliament and Council. The money will be used to help the country deal with damages caused by the flooding disaster that took place in 2017. In particular, it will cover some of the costs of restoration of essential infrastructure and public buildings, clean-up operations and securing protectingdams. Commissioner for Regional policy Corina **Creţu** said: *"In the face of tragedy, the EU does not turn a blind eye. With the emergency and recovery operations that it finances, the Solidarity Fund shows once again that the EU helps people rebuild their lives."* The European Solidarity Fund (EUSF) provides assistance to EU member states and countries engaged in accession negotiations struck by natural disasters. Financial aid is awarded based on how wealthy the affected state or region is and the amount of total direct damage suffered. Since the EUSF was set up in 2002, after more than 80 disasters – including floods, forest fires, earthquakes, storms and drought – 24 countries have received EUSF aid totalling more than €5 billion for emergency and recovery operations. *(For more information: Christian Spahr– Tel.: +32 229 50055, Andreana Stankova- Tel.: +32 229 57857)*

Antitrust: Commission seeks feedback on commitments offered by NBCUniversal, Sony Pictures, Warner Bros, and Sky in pay-TV investigation

The European Commission is inviting comments from interested parties on commitments offered by NBCUniversal, Sony Pictures, Warner Bros, and Sky to address competition concerns relating to contractual clauses preventing the cross-border provision of pay-TV. The Commission's concerns relate to contractual clauses in certain bilateral film licensing contracts between six major film studios, including NBCUniversal, Sony Pictures, and Warner Bros, and the pay-TV broadcaster Sky UK, under which the studios license their output of films over a certain time for pay-TV to Sky UK. These clauses appear to prevent Sky UK from allowing EU consumers outside the UK and Ireland to access pay-TV services available in the UK and Ireland. Some film licensing contracts also contain clauses requiring the studios to ensure that, in their contracts with broadcasters other than Sky UK, these broadcasters are prevented from making their pay-TV services available in the UK and Ireland. In a Statement of Objections addressed to the film studios and Sky UK in July 2015, the Commission took the preliminary view that these clauses restrict broadcasters' ability to accept unsolicited requests from consumers located outside the licenced territory (so called "passive sales"), and, as a result, may eliminate cross-border competition between pay-TV broadcasters and partition the EU's Single Market across national borders. NBCUniversal, Sony Pictures, and Warner Bros have decided to offer commitments to address the Commission's competition concerns. The proposed commitments are similar to those offered by Paramount in April 2016, which were accepted and made legally binding in July 2016. Disney has also offered comparable commitments in November 2018. The commitments would apply for a period of five years and cover both standard pay-TV services and, to the extent that they are included in the licence(s) with a pay-TV broadcaster, also subscription video-on-demand services. The commitments cover both satellite broadcast services and online services. A summary of the proposed commitments will published in the EU's Official Journal. Interested parties can submit comments within one month from the date of publication. The full text of the commitments will be available on the case website (NBCU, Sky, Warner Bros, Sony). The full press release is available online in EN, FR, DE.*(For more information: Lucía Caudet – Tel. +32 229 56182; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)*

Antitrust: Commission sends Statement of Objections in US Dollar supra-sovereign, sovereign and agency bond trading cartel

The European Commission has informed four banks of its preliminary view that they have breached EU antitrust rules by colluding, in periods from 2009 to 2015, to distort competition in secondary market trading in the European Economic Area of supra-sovereign, sovereign and agency bonds, known as "SSA bonds" denominated in US Dollars. The Commission has concerns that the four banks exchanged commercially sensitive information and coordinated on prices concerning SSA bonds. These contacts would have taken place mainly through online chatrooms. Bonds are debt securities paying a defined rate of interest, which enable entities to raise funds in international financial markets, and which are subsequently held as investments or traded like any other financial instrument. If the Commission's preliminary view were confirmed, such behaviour would violate EU rules that prohibit anticompetitive business practices such as collusion on prices (Article 101 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and Article 53 of the EEA Agreement). The Commission's investigation relates to conduct by certain traders at the four banks and does not imply that the alleged anti-competitive conduct was a general practice amongst SSA bond traders. The sending of a statement of objections does not prejudge the outcome of an investigation. The full press release is available online in EN, FR, DE. *(For more information: Lucía Caudet – Tel. +32 229 56182; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)*

State aid: Commission concludes Gibraltar gave around €100 million of illegal tax advantages to multinational companies

The European Commission has found that Gibraltar's corporate tax exemption regime for interest and royalties, as well as five tax rulings, are illegal under EU State aid rules. Following an in-depth investigation opened in October 2013 and extended to Gibraltar's tax rulings practicein October 2014, the Commission has found that both Gibraltar's corporate tax exemption regime for interest and royalties from 2011 to 2013, as well as five individual tax rulings, selectively favoured certain categories of companies, in breach of

EU State aid rules. The beneficiaries of the illegal State aid now have to return unpaid taxes of around €100 million to Gibraltar. With respect to the corporate tax exemptions, the Commission welcomes the fact that Gibraltar has already abolished the illegal tax exemption – in July 2013 for interest income and in January 2014 for royalties income. Furthermore, during the Commission's investigation, Gibraltar amended its tax rules to enhance its tax ruling procedure, reinforce its transfer pricing rules, enhance taxpayers' obligations and improve transparency on how it implements its territorial system of taxation. The Commission welcomes these improved rules, which entered into effect in October 2018. Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said "*Our investigation has found that Gibraltar gave unfair and selective tax benefits to several multinational companies, through a corporate tax exemption scheme and through five tax rulings. This preferential tax treatment is illegal under EU State aid rules and Gibraltar must now recover the unpaid taxes. At the same time, I very much welcome the significant actions taken by Gibraltar to remove the illegal tax exemptions, streamline its tax ruling practice, and reinforce its transfer pricing rules – this should help ensure that these issues remain in the past*." The press release is available online in EN, FR, DE, ES. *(For more information: Lucía Caudet – Tel. +32 229 56182; Giulia Astuti – Tel.: +32 229 55344)*

State aid: Commission approves €9 million public funding to promote shift of transport of iron slabs from road to rail in Italy

The European Commission has approved under EU State aid rules a €9 million aid scheme to encourage the shift of the transport of iron slabs from road to rail in the region of Friuli Venezia Giulia in Italy. The scheme will run until 2021. The public support takes the form of a subsidy to logistic companies performing the whole service, including the unloading and transhipment of the slabs, with the objective of reducing prices of rolling mills located in industrial zones. The level of support companies can receive is based on the reduction in the external costs (pollution, noise, congestion and accidents) they achieve by using rail transport compared to road transport. The Commission also found that the measure is necessary as it provides the right incentives to logistic companies to switch to rail transport. The Commission also found that the scheme is beneficial for the environment and mobility, as it supports rail transport, which is less polluting than road transport, while also decreasing road congestion and avoiding damages to roads and bridges caused by the exceptional heavy load transport of the slabs on road in the interested area. On this basis, the Commission concluded that the scheme is compatible with EU State aid rules, in particular Article 93 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union regarding transport coordination and the Commission Guidelines on State aid for railway undertakings. More information will be available on the Commission's competition website, in the public case register under the case number SA.50115. *(For more information: Lucía Caudet – Tel. +32 229 56182; Giulia Astuti – Tel.: +32 229 55344)*

Aides d'État: la Commission approuve la prolongation du régime d'aide d'État en faveur du transport maritime en France

La Commission européenne a autorisé, en vertu des règles de l'UE en matière d'aides d'État, le regroupement, la prolongation et la modification de deux régimes de soutien en faveur du secteur du transport maritime en France. Le nouveau régime consolidé exonère de cotisations de sécurité sociale les marins employés à bord de navires transportant des marchandises et des passagers. La France s'engage à étendre le bénéfice du régime à tous les navires admissibles battant pavillon d'un État membre de l'UE ou de l'espace économique européen (EEE). La Commission a conclu que le régime, qui restera en vigueur pendant dix ans, est conforme aux orientations de l'Union européenne sur les aides d'État au transport maritime adoptées par la Commission en 2004 car il contribuera à la compétitivité mondiale du secteur, tout en préservant l'emploi et en garantissant des conditions de concurrence équitables dans le marché unique européen. Plus d'informations seront disponibles sur le site internet de la Direction Générale de la Concurrence de la Commission, dans le registre des aides d'État sous le numéro SA. 46309. *(For more information: Lucía Caudet – Tel. +32 229 56182; Giulia Astuti – Tel.: +32 229 55344)*

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of joint control over a real estate joint venture at Middlewood Locks site by OMERS, DV4, ABP and QIA

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of joint control over a joint venture to rent residential real estate at the Middlewood Locks site in Manchester, UK, by Oxford Jersey Holding Company Limited ("Oxford") of Jersey, DV4 Limited ("DV4") of the British Virgin Islands, Stichting Depositary APG Strategic Real Estate Pool ("APG") of the Netherlands and Qatari Diar Real Estate Investment Company Q.P.S.C. ("QDREIC") of Qatar. Oxford is part of the wider OMERS Administration Corporation ("OMERS") Group of Canada, which manages a diversified global portfolio of stocks and bonds as well as real estate, private equity and infrastructure investments. DV4 is a real estate investment fund. APG is a depositary for an investment fund whose ultimate beneficial owner is Stichting Pensioenfonds ABP ("ABP"), a pension administration organisation specialised in collective pensions in the public sector. QDREIC is a real estate investment and development company, a wholly owned entity of the Qatar Investment Authority ("QIA") of Qatar. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, given the very limited impact of the transaction on the market. 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.9154. *(For more information: Lucía Caudet – Tel. +32 229 56182; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)*

Mergers: Commission clears the creation of two joint ventures between Toyota and Sumitomo

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of joint control over two newly created joint ventures, Kinto Corporation ("Kinto") and Mobilots Corporation ("Mobilots"), by Toyota Motor Corporation ("Toyota") and Sumitomo Corporation ("Sumitomo"), both of Japan. Kinto and Mobilots will be active in Japan and will provide financing services for passenger vehicles and for commercial vehicles, respectively.

Toyota is active in manufacturing, sale, leasing and repair of motor vehicles, ships, aircraft and other transportation equipment. Sumitomo is a trading and investment company with activities in a wide variety of sectors, including automobile leasing. The Commission concluded that the proposed transactions would raise no competition concerns because the joint ventures have no current or planned activities in the European Economic Area. The transactions were examined under the simplified merger review procedure. More information will be available on the Commission's competition website, in the public case registerunder the case numbers M.9215 and M.9216. *(For more information: Lucía Caudet – Tel. +32 229 56182; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)*

Digital Single Market: new EU telecoms rules enter into force

Today the new rules establishing the European Electronic Communications Code (Code) and the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC) enter into force. As of today the BEREC regulation is applicable. Furthermore, the Member States have two years to transpose the rules of the Code into their national laws. The new telecoms rules were adopted by the European Parliament in November 2018 and by the Council of the European Union in December 2018. They respond to the needs of today and tomorrow by creating an investment-friendly and pro-competitive framework which will lay the groundwork for the development of 5G across Europe (more about radio spectrum). Vice-President for the Digital Single Market Andrus **Ansip** and Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society Mariya **Gabriel** said: "*The new telecoms rules are an essential step forward to better succeed Europe's digital transformation. They allow a faster and better coordinated access to radio spectrum, improved services and more effective protection for consumers, as well as greater investment in very high speed networks.*" These rules are crucial for achieving Europe's connectivity targets and providing everyone in the EU the best possible internet connection, so they can participate fully in the digital economy. In addition, they will bring down the international call prices: from 15 May 2019 people will be able to make calls to other EU countries for a maximum of 19 cents a minute and send SMS for 6 cents. More information is available in these Questions & Answers. *(For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Marietta Grammenou – Tel.: +32 229 83583)*

Eurostat: 16% des internautes ayant un emploi ont vu leurs tâches professionnelles changer du fait de nouveaux logiciels ou équipements informatisés

Au début de l'année 2018, 87% des habitants de l'Union européenne (UE) âgés de 16 à 74 ans avaient utilisé internet au moins une fois au cours des douze derniers mois. Parmi les internautes en emploi, 71% ont indiqué qu'ils utilisaient des ordinateurs de bureau, des ordinateurs portables, des smartphones, des tablettes ou d'autres appareils portables au travail et 19% utilisaient des équipements ou machines informatisés. Les tâches professionnelles de 16% des internautes ayant un emploi dans l'UE avaient changé en raison de l'introduction de nouveaux logiciels ou équipements informatisés au cours des douze mois précédant l'enquête, et 29% avaient dû apprendre à utiliser de nouveaux logiciels ou équipements informatisés pour leur travail. Près de la moitié (47%) des internautes ayant un emploi dans l'UE estimaient que leurs compétences liées à l'utilisation d'ordinateurs, de logiciels ou d'applications au travail étaient en adéquation avec leurs fonctions, tandis que 18% possédaient plus de compétences que celles requises pour les fonctions exercées actuellement et 9% reconnaissaient qu'ils avaient besoin d'une formation complémentaire. Un communiqué de presse est disponible en ligne. *(For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Marietta Grammenou- Tel.: +32 229 83583)*

Eurostat: La position extérieure nette d'investissements de l'UE en baisse à 1 100 milliards d'euros

Les stocks nets d'investissements directs étrangers (IDE) détenus dans le reste du monde par les investisseurs résidant dans l'Union européenne (UE) s'élevaient à 7 412 milliards d'euros à la fin de l'année 2017, en baisse de 4,8% par rapport à fin 2016. Dans le même temps, les stocks d'investissement détenus par le reste du monde dans l'UE sont restés quasiment stable à 6 295 milliards d'euros à fin 2017 (-0,3%). En d'autres termes, la position extérieure nette d'investissements de l'UE vis-à-vis du reste du monde a diminué, passant de 1 469 milliards à fin 2016 à 1 117 milliards à fin 2017. Les entités à vocation spéciale (EVS) résidentes de l'UE ont maintenu leur rôle majeur dans les IDE, détenant 48,7% des stocks totaux d'IDE de l'UE à l'étranger et 59,7% des stocks d'IDE du reste du monde dans l'UE, contre respectivement 49,9% et 60,0% en 2016. 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

Commissioner Stylianides visits the Hellenic Parliament to discuss rescEU

Today Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos **Stylianides** meets with Members of the Hellenic Parliament in Athens to present rescEU, the EU's comprehensive proposal to strengthen Europe's emergency response to disasters. rescEU is at the last phase of adoption after a provisional political agreement was reached between the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council on 12 December. The proposal foresees an improved European response to natural and man-made disasters in Europe together with more effective prevention and preparedness against risks and emergencies. This is the EU's response to natural disasters that have a severe impact on the lives and properties of EU's citizens such as the deadly forest fires in Greece in 2018 and Portugal in 2017. *(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)

EU steps up WTO action against China’s forced technology transfers

With this move, the EU significantly broadens and deepens the scope of its WTO action against Chinese measures on forced technology transfers. This step is taken in the light of additional findings concerning the incompatibility of the Chinese measures on the approval of investments and the protection of foreign companies’ intellectual property rights with the agreed multilateral rules.

Commissioner for Trade Cecilia **Malmström** said: *“We cannot tolerate that EU companies have to give away valuable technology as a price to pay for investing in China. This clearly goes against the rules that China committed itself to when it joined the WTO. Today, we launch a broader and more systemic legal challenge against this illegal practice, as we believe that it is a major issue affecting European companies doing business in China. This is a matter that can and should be solved within the international, multilateral framework.”*

In its revised request to the WTO, the EU is challenging Chinese laws that regulate:

– the approval of investments in the areas of electric vehicles (New Energy Vehicles) and biotechnology (crop seeds), part of the strategic sectors of Made in China 2025 plan,

– the approval of joint ventures across sectors,

as they impose performance requirements on foreign companies operating in China, and restrict the economic and contractual freedom of foreign companies on investments and technology transfers.

The so-called performance requirements force or induce European companies to transfer technology to their joint ventures with Chinese partners in exchange for the necessary administrative approvals by the Chinese authorities. Foreign companies are also required to carry out research and development activities in China.

At the time of joining the WTO China committed not to impose performance requirements in exchange for investment approvals, and to preserve the contractual freedom of companies in China, in particular in the context of investments and technology transfers. The EU maintains therefore that the Chinese current policy measures are in violation of the China’s legal commitments.

The measures challenged today come on top of what the EU had covered in its initial legal action triggered in June 2018. The previous request targeted provisions of the Technology Import and Export Regulation (“TIER”) and the Regulation for the Implementation of the Law on Chinese-Foreign Equity Joint

Ventures ("JV Regulation"), as they go against the WTO rules of equal treatment for national and foreign companies and unduly restrict the rights of EU companies, among others in relation to patents.

Background

The request for consultations formally initiates the WTO dispute settlement proceedings. If consultations do not reach a satisfactory solution within 60 days, the EU may request the WTO to set up a panel to rule on the compatibility of China's measures with WTO rules.

Further information

EU new consultation request

EU previous consultation request

WTO dispute settlement in a nutshell

EU trade policy and intellectual property

EU trade relation with China

Migration and borders: Commission awards additional €305 million to Member States under pressure

The funding will support efforts to increase reception capacity, protect victims of human trafficking and strengthen border surveillance and management capacity.

Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris **Avramopoulos** said: *"The Commission is committed to continue supporting Member States under migratory pressure. The additional €305 million awarded this week to several countries will address urgent needs by ensuring that new arrivals are accommodated adequately and have access to food and water, that the safety and security of the most vulnerable is guaranteed, and that border controls are strengthened where needed."*

The emergency funding will be provided under the Commission's Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Internal Security Fund (ISF), and is part of the €10.8 billion for migration, border management and internal security already mobilised by the Commission for the period 2014-20.

Greece

The Commission is making **€289 million** available to support migration management in Greece. Funding will be allocated to:

- **Rental accommodation and allowances:** €190 million will go to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to ensure the UNHCR-run Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation (ESTIA) programme can be continued. ESTIA provides rental accommodation for up to 25,000 asylum seekers and refugees as well as monthly cash allowances for up to 70,000 persons. UNHCR will also receive another €5 million to further step up the reception capacity in the new open reception facilities on the Greek mainland, through the provision and distribution of 400 pre-fabricated containers.
- **Reception conditions:** €61 million will go to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) to allow for the continuation of on-site support programmes in reception facilities in the mainland. This includes access to healthcare and non-formal education, dedicated safe zones for unaccompanied minors as well as training for operational staff.
- **Search and rescue:** The Hellenic Coast Guard has been awarded €33 million to support the running costs of maritime awareness activities in the Aegean and help ensure safe disembarkation and efficient processing following search and rescue operations.
- **Winterisation:** To support preparedness efforts, the IOM will receive an additional €357,000 to provide blankets, winter jackets and winterisation kits for reception facilities in the Greek islands and in the Evros region.

The Commission has now made **more than €2 billion** of funding available to Greece for migration management, of which nearly €1.5 billion is emergency financial support. (See the factsheet for more information).

Italy

The Commission is awarding **€5.3 million** in emergency funding to the Italian authorities to help **protect victims of human trafficking** in the context of migration. Through a pilot project in accommodation facilities for asylum seekers in the Piemonte region, the funding will be used to help identify victims of human trafficking, and encourage them to make use of available support.

Since the beginning of the migration crisis, the Commission has made almost **€950 million** available to support migration and border management in Italy. This funding includes over €225 million in emergency support and €724 million already allocated to Italy under its national programmes of the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund and the Internal Security Fund 2014-2020 (see the factsheet for more information).

Cyprus

The Commission is awarding **€3.1 million to Cyprus to step up its reception capacity** and transform the temporary emergency centre "Pournaras" into a fully-fledged first reception centre. The funding will ensure that the centrecan function as a “one-stop shop”, operating on a 24/7 basis. Services provided will include medical examination, registration, fingerprinting, screening, information provision, and the possibility to submit an asylum application.

The emergency assistance is part of the Commission’s efforts to reinforce migration management support for Cyprus after the country has seen arrival figures increase significantly in the course of 2018. The new funding comes on top of almost **€40 million** allocated to migration management for the period 2014-2020, and nearly €1 million of emergency funding for migration awarded in 2014. The European Asylum Support office is currently deploying 29 caseworkers to support Cyprus in clearing the backlog of asylum applications due to increased arrivals in recent years.

Croatia

The Commission is awarding **€6.8 million** to Croatia to help reinforce border management at the EU’s external borders, in full respect of EU rules. The funding will help strengthen border surveillance and law enforcement capacity by covering the operational costs of 10 border police stations through the provision of the daily allowances, over-time compensation and equipment. A monitoring mechanism will be put in place to ensure that all measures applied at the EU external borders are proportionate and are in full compliance with fundamental rights and EU asylum laws.

Today’s award brings the overall emergency funding for migration and border management allocated to Croatia by the Commission to almost **€23.2 million**. This comes on top of nearly €108 million allocated to Croatia under the national programmes of the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund and the Internal Security Fund 2014-2020.

Background

EU operational and financial support has been instrumental in helping Member States to address the migration challenge since 2015.

EU support included unprecedented financial support to partners from the EU budget – not only national authorities but international organisations and non-governmental organisations as well. From the original allocations for 2014-20 of €6.9 billion to the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), and the Internal Security Fund (ISF – Borders and Police instruments), an additional €3.9 billion was mobilised to reach €10.8 billion for migration, border management and internal security.

Moreover, learning from past experience, and given that migration and border management will continue to be a challenge in the future, the Commission also proposed to significantly reinforce funding for migration and border management under the next EU budget, from 2021 to 2027.

For more information

Communication – Managing Migration in all its Aspects: Progress under the

European Agenda on Migration

Factsheet – EU Financial Support to Greece

Factsheet – EU Financial Support to Italy

Video – ESTIA Project: Emergency Support to Integration and Accommodation