

Daily News 07 / 12 / 2018

Member States and Commission to work together to boost artificial intelligence “made in Europe”

Delivering on its strategy on artificial intelligence (AI) adopted in April 2018 today the Commission presents a [coordinated plan](#) prepared with Member States to foster the development and use of AI in Europe. Vice-President for the Digital Single Market Andrus **Ansip** welcomed this important step: *“I am pleased to see that European countries have made good progress. We agreed to work together to pool data – the raw material for AI – in sectors such as healthcare to improve cancer diagnosis and treatment. We will coordinate investments: our aim is to reach at least €20 billion of private and public investments by the end of 2020. This is essential for growth and jobs. AI is not a nice-to-have, it is about our future”*. Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society Mariya **Gabriel** added: *“Like electricity in the past, AI is transforming the world. Together with Member States we will increase investments for rolling out AI into all sectors of the economy, support advanced skills and maximise the availability of data. The coordinated action plan will ensure that Europe reaps the benefits of AI for citizens and businesses and competes globally, while safeguarding trust and respecting ethical values.”* The plan proposes joint actions for closer and more efficient cooperation between Member States, Norway, Switzerland and the Commission in four key areas: increasing investment, making more data available, fostering talent and ensuring trust. A [press release](#), [Q&A](#) and [factsheet](#) are available online. Vice-President Ansip gave a [press conference](#) earlier today. (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Joseph Waldstein – Tel.: +32 229 56184; Marietta Grammenou- Tel.: +32 229 83583)

L’Union européenne renforce son soutien au développement du Sahel

L’UE a annoncé hier un nouveau financement de 125 millions d’euros pour les pays du Sahel lors de la [Conférence de coordination des partenaires et des bailleurs](#) du G5 Sahel à Nouakchott, en Mauritanie. Ce montant sera mobilisé pour de nouvelles actions devant être mises en place rapidement et répondant aux priorités établies par le G5 Sahel pour renforcer le développement et la sécurité. Dans ce cadre, l’accent sera mis sur la résilience et la cohésion sociale des populations les plus vulnérables des régions transfrontalières. Le commissaire européen pour la coopération internationale et le développement, Neven **Mimica** a déclaré: *«Dix mois après la Conférence de Bruxelles sur le Sahel, qui avait mobilisé la communauté internationale autour de la Force Conjointe du G5, nous mettons aujourd’hui l’accent sur le besoin absolu d’accompagner nos actions sécuritaires par des projets de développement. Grâce aux 125 millions d’euros additionnels que l’Union européenne annonce aujourd’hui, l’accent sera mis sur des projets de développement dans les zones les plus fragiles, avec un impact immédiat sur les conditions de vie des populations locales.»* La nouvelle enveloppe

comprend des contributions visant à améliorer les conditions de vie des populations dans les espaces transfrontaliers et des institutions des pays du G5 Sahel, ainsi qu'à lutter contre le trafic d'êtres humains. Le [communiqué de presse](#) et le [mémo](#) sont disponibles en ligne. (Pour plus d'informations: Carlos Martin Ruiz de Gordejuela – Tél.: +32 229 65322; Christina Wunder – Tél.: +32 229 92256)

L'Union européenne renforce sa coopération avec le Niger

L'Union européenne a mobilisé une enveloppe de 108 millions d'euros supplémentaires en faveur des politiques sociales, de la sécurité, de la bonne gouvernance et de l'accès à l'électricité au Niger. Cette annonce a été faite hier par le commissaire européen pour la coopération internationale et le développement, Neven **Mimica** en marge de la [Conférence de coordination des partenaires et des bailleurs](#) organisée par le G5 Sahel à Nouakchott, en Mauritanie. Le commissaire **Mimica** s'est également entretenu avec le président du Niger Mahamadou Issoufou. Le commissaire **Mimica** a déclaré: «L'Union européenne reste déterminée à soutenir le Niger qui fait face à des défis exceptionnels, tels que la menace terroriste, le trafic d'êtres humains, ainsi qu'à une forte croissance démographique. Ce financement supplémentaire de 108 millions d'euros permettra d'améliorer la mise en œuvre des politiques publiques au Niger dans des secteurs clés, ciblant notamment les populations vulnérables dans les zones rurales». Cette augmentation de 90 millions d'euros du programme indicatif national et la subvention de 18 millions d'euros à l'investissement pour l'amélioration de l'accès à l'électricité ont été approuvés dans le cadre du partenariat renforcé avec le Niger, en vertu d'une approche intégrée combinant le développement, la sécurité (y compris avec le G5 Sahel), l'assistance humanitaire et le contrôle des migrations irrégulières. 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)

L'Union européenne mobilise 50 millions d'euros supplémentaires pour des réformes structurelles au Mali

L'Union européenne renforce sa coopération avec le Mali pour la mise en œuvre de réformes structurelles pour l'amélioration de la sécurité, de la gouvernance et de l'accès aux services de base grâce à une enveloppe de 50 millions d'euros entérinée hier par le commissaire européen pour la coopération internationale et le développement Neven **Mimica** et la ministre malienne des affaires étrangères et de la coopération internationale Mme Kamissa Camara, à Nouakchott, en Mauritanie, en marge de la [Conférence de coordination des partenaires et des bailleurs](#) du G5 Sahel. Le commissaire **Mimica** a déclaré: «Ces 50 millions d'euros supplémentaires réaffirment l'engagement continu de l'UE en faveur de la paix et du développement au Mali et de la population du pays. Ces fonds supplémentaires seront versés pour accompagner les progrès que les autorités maliennes se sont engagées à réaliser auprès du peuple malien, dans la mise en œuvre des réformes structurelles.» Ce montant additionnel permettra d'augmenter les enveloppes des programmes d'appui budgétaire en cours au Mali qui accompagnent la mise

en œuvre des réformes pour le renforcement de la sécurité au Mali, la lutte contre la corruption, l'amélioration de l'accès à l'éducation élémentaire, en particulier pour les filles, ainsi que l'accès à une justice équitable, l'augmentation de l'offre de formation professionnelle, et la réduction de l'insécurité alimentaire. 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)

Commission welcomes the agreement to better protect children in cross-border family disputes

Today, Justice Ministers reached a political agreement on the Commission's [proposal](#) to update the rules that protect children in cross-border family proceedings. The new rules will speed up the legal and administrative proceedings and ensure that the child's best interest is always taken into account. The number of international divorces now reaches some 140,000 per year in the EU and there are annually up to 1,800 cases of parental child abduction within the EU. Věra Jourová, Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality said: *"Children whose parents are separating should not have to deal with long, burdensome legal procedures. I am delighted that Member States have today agreed to shorten and simplify these proceedings. This will benefit children and their families, who will end up saving their time and money. This is a big step forward in protecting children in the EU."* The updated rules will allow for faster enforcement of decisions, by abolishing intermediate procedures and by aligning the conditions under which a decision may be rejected or suspended. They will also ensure that children have an opportunity to express their views in all proceedings concerning their case, in particular on custody or if a child was abducted by one of the parents. Finally, the Regulation will set clearer rules on the placement of a child in another Member State and on child abduction cases. The decision in the Council was taken by unanimity, as required by the special legislative procedure for judicial cooperation in family matters. The European Parliament was consulted and adopted its opinion in January 2018. The Council will now finalise the adoption of the Regulation in the coming months. (For more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Mélanie Voin – Tel.: +32 229 5865)

La Commission approuve la modification de plusieurs programmes de la politique de Cohésion au Portugal

À la demande du Portugal, la Commission a donné son feu vert à la modification de onze programmes de la politique de Cohésion. 2,7 milliards d'euros de fonds de la politique de Cohésion seront réorientés vers les priorités définies par le gouvernement portugais. Compte tenu de la vigueur de la croissance économique, cet exercice de reprogrammation du Portugal permettra au pays de poursuivre la mise en œuvre des réformes structurelles et d'assurer la viabilité des finances publiques tout en investissant pour l'avenir. La commissaire à la politique régionale Corina Crețu a déclaré: *"Cette reprogrammation n'est pas un simple exercice arithmétique. Il s'agit du Portugal qui définit ses priorités pour les années à venir, à savoir créer*

de la croissance et des emplois pour les citoyens. Il s'agit de l'Union européenne qui fait preuve de flexibilité et donne au Portugal les moyens d'investir pour son avenir. Mais il s'agit avant tout de la formidable coopération entre l'UE et le Portugal tout au long de ce processus, qui s'achève officiellement aujourd'hui. Je ne pourrais être plus fière de ce que nous avons accompli". Les programmes révisés permettront au Portugal de concentrer davantage les ressources dans des domaines clés comme l'innovation dans les petites et moyennes entreprises, les compétences et la formation, l'aide à l'emploi et à l'entrepreneuriat, la mobilité urbaine et les infrastructures sociales. La reprogrammation permettra aussi la mise en œuvre de nouveaux grands projets d'infrastructures comme l'extension des métros de Lisbonne et de Porto. Un communiqué de presse est disponible [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Christian Spahr – Tel.: +32 2 295 00 55; Sophie Dupin de Saint-Cyr – Tel.: +32 229 56169)

Statement of Commissioner Andriukaitis on the adoption of Council Recommendation on vaccine preventable diseases

Today the Health Ministers of the EU adopted the [Council Recommendation](#) on strengthened cooperation against vaccine preventable diseases focused on three main pillars: tackling vaccine hesitancy and improving vaccination coverage; sustainable vaccination policies in the EU; and EU coordination and contribution to global health. The Recommendation insists on targeted outreach towards vulnerable groups, calls to strengthen vaccination training in medical curricula and exploits the synergies with eHealth and digital technologies to establish electronic vaccination records for all EU citizens. Vytenis **Andriukaitis**, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, said: *"I unequivocally welcome the adoption of the Recommendation and call on all Member States to implement the actions agreed in it. They can count on my full support and I hope I can count on theirs. I will remain a tireless advocate for life-saving vaccines and work together with all Member States and actors to keep immunisation high on the European and global health agendas. Next year, I will launch a Coalition of Vaccination and the Commission will host a Global Vaccination Summit under EU leadership to leverage genuine and strategic efforts in this area. In addition, the Commission will establish a European vaccination information portal to provide online objective, transparent and updated evidence on the benefits and safety of vaccines."* More information [here](#). (For more information: Anca Paduraru – Tel.: +32 229 91269; Aikaterini Apostola – Tel.: +32 229 87624)

Food Safety: Member States support Commission's proposal to cut down presence of trans fatty acids

Today, in the context of a Standing Committee, Member States endorsed Commission's proposal to set a maximum limit on the use of industrially produced [trans-fat](#) in foods in the EU. The measure aims at protecting consumers' health and promoting healthier food options to Europeans. Over the years, a number of scientific studies, including a recent one from [European](#)

[Food Safety Authority](#), have stressed that the dietary intakes of trans fatty acids should be as low as possible in order to avoid health risks. Commissioner Vytenis **Andriukaitis**, in charge of Health and Food Safety, welcomed the outcome of the vote, stressing that: *“the increasingly high intake of trans fats has been a great concern for doctors, such as myself, for many years, and numerous scientific studies have shown that something had to be done about it. Today’s favourable vote is a step forward since it will lead to concrete actions to eliminate industrially-produced trans fats, for the benefits of the EU citizens. Following the Parliament exam of the text, I look forward to a final adoption of the Regulation by spring 2019’.* The maximum limit set today corresponds to 2 grams of trans fats per 100 grams of fat in the food intended for the final consumer. The European Parliament has now two months to examine the draft Regulation. (For more information: Anca Paduraru – Tel.: +32 229 91269; Aikaterini Apostola – Tel.: +32 229 87624)

Commission reports on progress in latest round of talks with Mercosur

The EU and Mercosur held their latest round of negotiations in Brussels from 12-20 November. It included substantial discussions on all topics both at chief negotiators’ and experts levels. As part of its ongoing transparency efforts the Commission has today published a report of this round. The [report](#) contains a summary of discussions in the different areas of the negotiation. Progress was made in particular as regards the core text of the agreement: transparency chapter was closed and work advanced on the trade and sustainable development chapter. The negotiation process continues and the next round will take place in Montevideo, Uruguay, from 10 to 13 December. The discussions will cover all topics, building on the progress made during the latest round. There is still a significant amount of work to be done to bridge the remaining gaps. The Commission remains committed to a successful conclusion of an ambitious, comprehensive and balanced agreement with Mercosur. For more information about EU-Mercosur negotiations, see a [dedicated page](#). (For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel.: +32 229 56185; Kinga Malinowska – Tel: +32 229 51383)

The Commission outlines a set of actions to keep cultural heritage high on the political agenda

Closing the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 at the [#EuropeForCulture conference in Vienna](#), the Commission has today highlighted a [series of actions on cultural heritage](#). Tibor **Navracsics**, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, said: *“I am proud that the European Year of Cultural Heritage has successfully reached millions of people across Europe and beyond. We now need to ensure that its legacy lives on – because cultural heritage is not only about the past, it is key in building a cohesive, resilient Europe for the future. With the European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage we are putting forward a range of initiatives to ensure that we make the most of cultural heritage in boosting economic growth, building strong communities and strengthen our relationship with our partners across the globe.”* During the 2018 [European Year of Cultural Heritage](#), over 6.2 million people took part in more than 11,700 events organised across 37

countries. To ensure that the European Year has a lasting impact beyond 2018, the Commission has today presented 60 actions related to the promotion and protection of cultural heritage in the longer term. During the 6-7 December #EuropeForCulture Conference the Commission is also presenting its new Cultural Gems mobile application and handing out a [special eTwinning award for cultural heritage](#). The two winning projects are [Monumental Europe](#) and [MATH 3.0 Amazing Trip through History](#), which have enabled learners to discover Europe's cultural heritage through intercultural and collaborative projects. A [press release](#) and a [factsheet](#) on the Framework and a [Q&A](#) and [factsheet](#) on the app are available online. (*For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Joseph Waldstein – Tel.: +32 229 56184*)

Sustainable Finance: Commission expert group calls for feedback on EU-wide classification system

The [Technical Expert Group on Sustainable Finance](#) set up by the Commission in July 2018 has today launched a call for feedback on EU action to develop a unified EU-wide classification system – or taxonomy – for environmentally sustainable economic activities. Today's announcement stems from the EU [Sustainable Finance Action Plan](#) that the Commission published in March 2018 and follows up on the [Commission's legislative proposal on an EU taxonomy](#) presented in May 2018. Step by step, the Commission will identify activities which qualify as 'sustainable', taking into account existing market practices and initiatives and drawing on the advice of the Technical Expert Group. In a first initiative, the Group is today sharing its preliminary results on how such a classification system could be put in place, and at the same time asks for technical input from interested stakeholders and experts. Participants will be invited to comment on the first proposed activities that contribute substantially to climate change mitigation and to answer questions on the usability of the taxonomy. The ultimate aim is to develop a system that provides businesses and investors with clarity on which activities are considered sustainable so they take more informed decisions. A number of workshops to gather technical expertise from interested parties is also envisaged. The invitation for feedback should help the technical expert group to engage with a broad range of stakeholders and experts and will close on 22 February 2019. More information available [here](#). (*For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: + 32 229 56194; Letizia Lupini – Tel.: +32 229 51958*)

Commission steps up fight against illicit tobacco trade

The Commission has today adopted an Action Plan to enable the European Union to continue fighting illegal tobacco trade, a phenomenon that deprives it and its Member States of roughly €10 billion of public revenue every year. The Action Plan outlines concrete steps to address both the supply of and the demand for illegal tobacco products. Welcoming the adoption of the Plan, European Commissioner for Budget and Human Resources Günther H. **Oettinger** said: *"Fighting the global illicit tobacco trade is a priority for the European Union. We should all join forces to stop smugglers and I am happy that today we are identifying further ways to achieve this. I call on all EU Member States to join us in this effort. Signing up to the UN's protocol is*

an important step in this direction.” The new Action Plan builds on the EU’s 2013 Strategy on fighting the illicit tobacco trade. With the recent entry into force of the World Health Organisation’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) Protocol and the roll-out of the new EU traceability system, required under the Protocol, today’s Action Plan proposes further initiatives to ensure the effective fight against illicit tobacco products. They include actions to fully exploit the potential of the FCTC Protocol as a global instrument, to engage key source and trade countries, thus limiting the supply arriving at EU’s borders, and to raise awareness among consumers. More information is available online [here](#). *(For more information: Alexander Winterstein – Tel.: +32 229 93265; Andreana Stankova – Tel.: +32 229 57857)*

State aid: Commission adopts prolongation of de minimis Regulation for services of general economic interest (SGEI)

The European Commission has decided to extend by two years the Regulation setting out the conditions under which support granted as compensation to providers of services of general economic interest (SGEI) does not constitute State aid within the meaning of EU rules (the “[SGEI de minimis Regulation](#)”). Under the Regulation, public service compensation measures of up to €500,000 per company over a three-year period are exempted from EU State aid rules because they are considered too small to affect competition or trade between Member States. The Regulation, which was adopted in [2012](#) and was originally set to expire on 31 December 2018, increases legal certainty and reduces the administrative burden for granting compensation for small SGEI. The Commission’s experience in applying the Regulation has demonstrated that the reasons for exempting such compensation measures from being notified to the Commission are still valid. Furthermore, the conditions on the basis of which the scope and content of the Regulation were determined at the time of the adoption have not substantially changed. On this basis and in order to ensure continuity and avoid increasing compliance costs for the services concerned, the Commission has therefore decided to prolong the SGEI de minimis Regulation until 31 December 2020. More information about the application of State aid rules to services of general economic interest and today’s decision is available [here](#). *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)*

State aid: Commission approves €3.8 million investment aid for CO₂ transport infrastructure and compressor station in The Netherlands

The European Commission has approved, under EU State aid rules, Dutch plans to grant €3.8 million of public support to the company OCAP CO₂ B.V. for the expansion of the supply of CO₂ to greenhouses in the Dutch horticulture area of De Kwakel in Aalsmeer. This measure is expected to reduce CO₂ emissions by 37.5 kilotonnes per year. The project involves the construction of infrastructure for the transport of waste CO₂ from an existing pipeline in Aalsmeer to greenhouses in De Kwakel, which need CO₂ for their crop growth. The project also includes an investment in a compressor station at the Alco bioethanol plant in Aalsmeer, where extra waste CO₂ capacity will be available in 2020. The compressor station will increase the amount of waste CO₂ that can be transported to the greenhouses. Currently, the greenhouses in

De Kwakel produce their own CO₂ using heating systems such as cogeneration systems or gas fired boilers. In summer, when heating is not needed, the greenhouses nevertheless use their heating systems for the sole purpose of CO₂ generation. Thanks to this measure, these greenhouses will instead be able to use excess waste CO₂. This will benefit the environment by reducing the use of primary energy sources that produce CO₂, as well as disposing of the waste CO₂ from Alco. The Commission assessed and approved the measure by applying principles set out under the Commission's [Guidelines on State aid for Environmental protection and Energy](#). More information on today's decision will be available on the Commission's [competition website](#), in the public [case register](#) under the case number SA.52174. (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Antitrust: Commission imposes binding obligations on TenneT to increase electricity trading capacity between Denmark and Germany

The European Commission has adopted a decision rendering legally binding commitments offered by German grid operator TenneT to significantly increase cross-border flows of electricity between Denmark and Germany. TenneT will ensure that a specific guaranteed capacity is available at all times. The Commission opened a formal investigation on [19 March 2018](#) to assess whether TenneT infringed EU antitrust rules by systematically limiting southward capacity at the electricity interconnector between Western Denmark and Germany. The Commission had concerns that through this behaviour TenneT discriminated against non-German electricity producers. This conduct prevented the export of cheap electricity from the Nordic countries, where it is largely generated from renewable energy sources to Germany, leading to less competition between electricity producers on the German wholesale market and therefore higher electricity prices. Following the opening of the formal antitrust investigation, TenneT offered commitments to address the Commission's concerns. The Commission then [consulted market participants](#) to verify whether the proposed commitments were indeed liable to remove the competition problems identified by the Commission. In light of the market test results, the Commission is satisfied that the commitments proposed by TenneT, address its concerns, and has made them legally binding on TenneT. Commissioner Margrethe Vestager, in charge of competition policy, said: *"Our decision to impose binding obligations on TenneT to increase capacity on the electricity interconnector between Denmark and Germany will allow more electricity producers to access the German wholesale market. This is fully in line with our ambition to make the European energy market more competitive and integrated, and to facilitate the EU's transition to cleaner, renewable energy sources to the benefit of consumers."* The press release is available online in [EN](#), [DE](#), [FR](#), [DA](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

State aid: Commission refers Romania to Court for failure to recover illegal aid worth up to €92 million

The European Commission has decided to refer Romania to the European Court of Justice for failing to fully recover illegal State aid worth up to €92 million, as required by a Commission decision of 2015. An arbitral award of

December 2013 (*Micula v Romania*) found that by revoking an investment incentive scheme in 2005, four years prior to its scheduled expiry in 2009, Romania had infringed a bilateral investment treaty between Romania and Sweden. Romania had abolished the scheme as part of the process of accession to the EU and in order to incorporate EU State aid rules into its national legislation. The arbitral tribunal ordered Romania to compensate the claimants, Viorel and Ioan Micula, two investors with Swedish citizenship, for not having benefitted in full from the scheme. However, on 30 March 2015 the Commission adopted a decision concluding that the compensation paid by Romania to the two investors and their companies was in breach of EU State aid rules and ordering Romania to recover the compensation from the beneficiaries. In particular, the Commission found that by paying the compensation awarded to the claimants, Romania would grant them advantages equivalent to those provided for by the incompatible aid scheme. The deadline for Romania to implement the Commission's decision was 31 July 2015 in line with standard procedures, i.e. four months from the official notification of the Commission decision. Romania has already recovered part of the illegal aid from the beneficiaries. However, more than three years after the Commission decision almost half of the original aid amount still remains to be recovered and there is still no prospect of an immediate full repayment of the outstanding aid. The Commission has therefore decided to refer Romania to the Court of Justice for failure to implement the Commission decision, in accordance with Article 108(2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). The press release is available online in [EN](#), [DE](#), [FR](#), [RO](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of joint control over Virta by E.ON and Helen

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of joint control over Liikennevirta Oy ("Virta") of Finland by E.ON SE, via its subsidiary E.ON Drive Infrastructure GmbH ("E.ON") of Germany, and Helen Oy ("Helen") of Finland. Virta provides a range of services related to the charging of electric vehicles. E.ON focusses on three main business areas: (i) electricity generation from renewable energy sources, (ii) energy distribution networks and (iii) customer solutions. In addition, E.ON offers e-mobility services, including the operation of charging stations for electrical vehicles in several EU countries. Helen's business consists primarily in the production of electricity, district heating and cooling, as well as energy distribution and sales. In addition, Helen offers a wide range of services for small-scale energy production and the customers' own energy use and since 2012, it also offers electric vehicle charging points in Finland. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns as Virta has negligible actual and foreseen activities in the European Economic Area. The operation 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.9032](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100;

Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Mergers: Commission clears the acquisition of sole control over Eurolife by Fairfax

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of sole control over Eurolife Erb Insurance Group Holdings S.A. (“Eurolife”) of Greece by Fairfax Financial Holdings Limited (“Fairfax”) of Canada. Eurolife, currently jointly controlled by Fairfax and OPG Commercial Holdings S.A. of Luxembourg, is active in life and non-life insurance and reinsurance and insurance distribution in Greece and Romania. Fairfax is a holding company active in property and casualty insurance and reinsurance and investment management. The Commission concluded that the proposed transaction would raise no competition concerns given the minor horizontal and vertical 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.9193](#). *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)*

Eurostat: Le PIB ainsi que l’emploi en hausse de 0,2% dans la zone euro

Au cours du troisième trimestre 2018, le PIB corrigé des variations saisonnières a progressé de 0,2% dans la zone euro (ZE19) et de 0,3% dans l’UE28 par rapport au trimestre précédent, selon l’estimation publiée par Eurostat, l’office statistique de l’Union européenne. Au cours du deuxième trimestre 2018, le PIB avait augmenté de 0,4% dans la zone euro et de 0,5% dans l’UE28. En comparaison avec le même trimestre de l’année précédente, le PIB corrigé des variations saisonnières s’est accru de 1,6% dans la zone euro et de 1,8% dans l’UE28 au troisième trimestre 2018, après respectivement +2,2% et +2,1% au deuxième trimestre 2018. Un communiqué de presse est disponible [ici](#). *(Pour plus d’informations: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Enda McNamara – Tel.: +32 229 64976; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: + 32 229 67094)*

STATEMENTS

Commissioner Gabriel congratulates the first 2,800 municipalities granted WiFi4EU vouchers

Today the European Commission announced the results of the first [WiFi4EU](#) call for proposals, which ran on 7-9 November 2018. 2,800 municipalities were selected to receive a WiFi4EU voucher worth €15,000. The total budget of the initiative was €42 million. The selected municipalities will be able to set up Wi-Fi hotspots in public spaces, such as town halls, libraries, museums, parks, squares and other places of public interest. Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society Mariya **Gabriel** welcomed the announcement in the following

statement: “Thanks to the first WiFi4EU call, 2,800 municipalities will be able to give thousands of Europeans and visitors free internet access in public spaces across the EU, bringing connectivity closer to citizens in their day-to-day lives. Those municipalities are located in all corners of Europe. Improving connectivity in the EU is a key part of our Digital Single Market strategy, and WiFi4EU is another concrete step to make it a reality for everyone.” You can read the full statement [here](#). There will be three further calls for which municipalities that did not receive a voucher this time can apply. The second call will be launched at the beginning of 2019. In total, around 8,000 municipalities will be able to benefit from this scheme between now and 2020. More general information on the initiative is available [here](#) and in our [factsheet](#). (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Marietta Grammenou- Tel.: +32 229 83583)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Commissioner Avramopoulos heads EU delegation at Intergovernmental Conference on the Global Compact for Migration

Next week (9-11 December), Commissioner **Avramopoulos** will be in Marrakesh to take part in the Intergovernmental Conference on the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. The Conference is convened under the auspices of the United Nations General Assembly to adopt the intergovernmentally negotiated text of the [Global Compact for Migration](#). Commissioner Avramopoulos will represent the EU, which takes part as an observer in the Conference. A live webcast of the sessions will be [available on the 10th and 11th of December](#). In the margins of the Conference on Sunday, Commissioner **Avramopoulos** will participate at a High level side event to launch the joint EU-OECD Report “Settling In 2018: Indicators of Integration of Immigrants and their children”. For more information on the Global Compact for Migration see here a [Q&A](#). (For more information: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456; Markus Lammert – Tel.: +32 229 80423)

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

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

[State aid: Commission refers Romania to Court for failure to recover illegal aid worth up to €92 million](#)

An arbitral award of December 2013 (Micula v Romania) found that by revoking an investment incentive scheme in 2005, four years prior to its scheduled

expiry in 2009, Romania had infringed a bilateral investment treaty between Romania and Sweden. Romania had abolished the scheme as part of the process of accession to the EU in order to comply with EU State aid rules in its national legislation.

The arbitral tribunal ordered Romania to compensate the claimants, Viorel and Ioan Micula, two investors with Swedish citizenship, for not having benefitted in full from the scheme.

However, following an in-depth investigation, on [30 March 2015](#) the Commission adopted a decision concluding that the compensation paid by Romania to the two investors and their companies was in breach of EU State aid rules and ordering Romania to recover the compensation from the beneficiaries.

In particular, the Commission found that by paying the compensation awarded to the claimants, Romania would grant them advantages equivalent to those provided for by the incompatible aid scheme.

As a matter of principle, EU State aid rules require that illegal State aid is recovered in order to remove the distortion of competition created by the aid.

The deadline for Romania to implement the Commission's decision was 31 July 2015 in line with standard procedures, i.e. four months from the official notification of the Commission decision. Until the illegal aid is fully recovered, the beneficiaries in question continue to benefit from an illegal competitive advantage, which is why recovery must happen as quickly as possible.

Romania has already recovered part of the illegal aid from the beneficiaries. However, more than three years after the Commission decision almost half of the original aid amount still remains to be recovered and there is still no prospect of an immediate full repayment of the outstanding aid.

The Commission has therefore decided to refer Romania to the Court of Justice for failure to implement the Commission decision, in accordance with [Article 108\(2\)](#) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).

Background

Member States have to recover illegal State aid within the deadline set in the Commission decision, which is usually four months. Article 16(3) of Regulation (EU) [No 2015/1589](#) and the case-law provide that Member States should immediately and effectively recover the aid from the beneficiary.

If a Member State does not implement a recovery decision, the Commission may refer the matter to the Court of Justice under Article 108(2) TFEU, which allows the Commission to directly refer cases to the Court for violations of EU State aid rules.

If a Member State does not comply with the judgment, the Commission may ask the Court to impose penalty payments under [Article 260 TFEU](#).

According to settled EU case law, a Commission decision is binding and enforceable also before national courts and recovery is governed by national law, provided this allows for immediate and effective recovery. In the present case, the recovery process has not advanced over the past years and Romanian courts have failed to comply with the Commission's recovery decision.

Calendrier du 10 au 16 décembre 2018

Déplacements et visites

Lundi 10 décembre 2018

Foreign Affairs Council

President Jean-Claude **Juncker** receives Mr Manfred Weber, Chairman of the EPP Group in the European Parliament.

Ms Federica **Mogherini** chairs the Foreign Affairs Council, in Brussels.

Mr Jyrki **Katainen** delivers a keynote speech at the conference "[Best practices of integrating refugees and migrants through Youth Organisations](#)" co-organised by the World Scout Bureau Europe Support Centre and the European Youth Forum, in Brussels.

Mr Jyrki **Katainen** receives a delegation of Finnish County Governors.

Johannes **Hahn** participates in the EU-Serbia Intergovernmental Conference, in Brussels.

Johannes **Hahn** participates in the EU-Montenegro Intergovernmental Conference, in Brussels.

Mr Miguel **Arias Cañete** in Katowice, Poland (10-15/12): participates in the 24th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP 24).

Mr Vytenis **Andriukaitis** receives representatives of Science Meets Life: Mr René Custers, Regulatory & responsible research manager, VIB and Prof. Dr. George Coupland, director of the Max Planck Institute for Plant Breeding in Cologne.

Mr Phil **Hogan** in Athens, Greece: meets Mr Stavros Arachovitis, Minister for Rural Development and Food of Greece; meets Mr Stelios Rallis, Secretary General for Digital Policy of Greece; and receives an Honorary Doctorate from the Agricultural University of Athens.

Ms Violeta **Bulc** participates in the 2nd Transport Community Treaty Ministerial Meeting and meets the Western Balkans Six (WB6) Ministers of Transport

Ms Violeta **Bulc** receives Mr Ayara Radhouane, Minister of Transport of Tunisia.

Ms Elżbieta **Bieńkowska** in Katowice, Poland: attends the Climate Change Conference and the Copernicus side-event on "[The global reach of Europe's Copernicus Climate Change Service.](#)"

Ms Věra **Jourová** delivers the opening speech at the Launch of the Antisemitism survey, in Brussels.

Mr Tibor **Navracsics** in Budapest, Hungary: speaks at a hearing held by the Committee on European Affairs of the Hungarian National Assembly.

Ms Corina **Crețu** in Strasbourg, France: attends and delivers a speech at the Inauguration of the European Aseptic and Sterile Environment (EASE) Training Centre of the University of Strasbourg.

Mr Julian **King** delivers a speech at the German Marshall Fund Launch Event, in Brussels.

Mardi 11 décembre 2018

College meeting

General Affairs Council

President Jean-Claude **Juncker** addresses the Plenary of the European Parliament on the preparations ahead of the European Council.

Mr Andrus **Ansip** in Nairobi, Kenya: delivers a speech at the Opening Session "Empowering African economies in the digital era" of the first [Africa eCommerce Week](#); and delivers a speech at the High-level Dialogue on Trade and the Digital Economy in Africa.

Mr Jyrki **Katainen** meets the CEOs of the Finnish Forest Industries, the Federation of Finnish Technology Industries and the Chemical Industry Federation of Finland, in Strasbourg.

Mr Carlos **Moedas** in Stockholm, Sweden; attends a working lunch with Mr Mikael Damberg, Swedish Minister for Enterprise and Innovation, Ms Helene Hellmark Knutsson, Swedish Minister for Higher Education and Research and various business and academic stakeholders; and delivers a keynote speech at the [Seminar on European Viable Cities Day 2018](#).

Ms Mariya **Gabriel** in Strasbourg, France; meets with a delegation from the Joint Committee on Communications, Climate Action and Environment of Ireland's Oireachtas; meets with a group of Bulgarian regional journalists; meets with Mr Volker Rieck and Mr Stefan Herwig, experts in informatic

technology and authors; and delivers a speech on Copyright at the “Meet the Authors” event organised by the [European Authors’ Societies \(GESAC\)](#) in the European Parliament.

Mercredi 12 décembre 2018

President Jean-Claude **Juncker**, together with Mr Johannes **Hahn**, receives His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan.

Ms Federica **Mogherini** meets His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan.

Mr Jyrki **Katainen** participates in the debate on the Future of Europe with Mr Nicos Anastasiades, President of Cyprus, in the European Parliament, in Strasbourg.

Mr Jyrki **Katainen** attends the meeting of the Presidency of the European People’s Party, in Brussels.

M. Pierre **Moscovici** à Francfort : rencontre M. Mario Draghi, Président de la Banque centrale européenne.

M. Pierre **Moscovici** à Francfort : participe à une conférence sur le futur de l’Europe organisée par le Financial Times.

Mr Christos **Stylianides** attends an official lunch hosted by Mr Antonio Tajani, President of the European Parliament honouring Mr Nikos Anastasiades, President of the Republic of Cyprus.

Mr Tibor **Navracsics** in Pécs, Hungary: gives a lecture on the role of culture in a changing Europe and how it can preserve our European identity, at the Roman Catholic Diocese of Pécs.

Ms Margrethe **Vestager** receives Mr Sébastien Soriano, Chairman of Arcep, Autorité de Régulation des Communications Électroniques et des Postes.

Jeudi 13 décembre 2018

European Council

President Jean-Claude **Juncker** receives Mr Sebastian Kurz, Chancellor of Austria.

President Jean-Claude Juncker receives Mr Lars Løkke Rasmussen, Prime Minister of Denmark.

President Jean-Claude Juncker participates in the European Council.

Mr Andrus **Ansip** receives Mr Andrej Babiš, Prime Minister of the Czech Republic.

Mr Valdis **Dombrovskis** meets Mr Petro Poroshenko, President of Ukraine, in Brussels.

Mr Jyrki **Katainen** attends the Summit of the European People's Party, in Brussels.

Mr Jyrki **Katainen** receives members of the Energy Transitions Commission.

Ms Cecilia **Malmström** participates in the [2018 Export Control Forum](#), in Brussels.

M. Pierre **Moscovici** à Paris : participe à l'audition du Sénat Français par les Commissions des Affaires européennes et des Finances.

Mr Christos **Stylianides** receives Dr Agostino Miozzo, Director General of the Department for Civil Protection of Italy.

Mr Phil **Hogan** in Antwerp, Belgium: delivers the closing address at the Agricultural European Innovation Partnership (EIP-AGRI) seminar on "Multi-level strategies for digitising agriculture and rural areas".

Mr Carlos **Moedas** receives the members of the Economic Affairs Committee of the French National Assembly.

Mr Carlos **Moedas** speaks at a commemoration ceremony in honour of late Professor Fotis Kafatos, founding President of the European Research Council, in Brussels.

Vendredi 14 décembre 2018

European Council

Euro Summit

President Jean-Claude **Juncker** participates in the European Council.

President Jean-Claude **Juncker** participates in the Euro Summit.

Mr Maroš **Šefčovič** chairs the EU Battery Alliance meeting on processing and refining of battery raw materials, in Brussels.

Ms Cecilia **Malmström** in Stockholm, Sweden: participates in a Trade Seminar at the House of Europe.

Mr Neven **Mimica** participates in a round of discussions on the future of the relations of the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries with the European Union, in Brussels.

Ms Marianne **Thyssen** in Vienna, Austria: delivers a keynote speech at the [EUCDW Congress](#).

M. Pierre **Moscovici** reçoit M. Roland Lescure, Président et les membres de la

Commission des Affaires économiques de l'Assemblée nationale.

M. Pierre **Moscovici** à Paris : prononce un discours et participe à la 15ème conférence Europa 2018 organisée par [EuropaNova](#).

Mr Christos **Stylianides** meets Mr Klaus Bouillon, Minister of the Interior of the German state of Saarland.

Mr Phil **Hogan** receives Mr Andrew McDowell, Vice-President of the European Investment Bank (EIB).

Ms Violeta **Bulc** in Ljubljana, Slovenia: participates in the regional conference of the International Automobile Federation (FIA).

Ms Věra **Jourová** in Prague, Czechia: delivers a speech at the Child Online Conference 2018 "Living in the digital world".

Mr Carlos **Moedas** receives a delegation from the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

Mr Carlos **Moedas** attends a reception with Antonio Costa, Prime Minister of Portugal, in Brussels.

Prévisions du mois de décembre:

17/12 EU-Kosovo* Stabilisation and Association Council; EU-Ukraine Association Council

17-18/12 Agriculture and Fisheries Council

18/12 EU-Serbia Stabilisation and Association Council

19/12 Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council (Energy)

20/12 Environment Council

Permanence DG COMM le WE du 15 au 16 décembre 2018:

Anca PADURARU: +32 (0) 498 96 64 30

Service Audiovisuel, planning studio – tél. : +32 (0)2/295 21 23

[Pratiques anticoncurrentielles: la Commission impose des obligations contraignantes à TenneT pour qu'elle accroisse la capacité d'échange d'électricité entre le Danemark et l'Allemagne](#)

To protect its democratic systems and public debates and in view of the 2019 European elections as well as a number of national and local elections that will be held in Member States by 2020, the EU is presenting today an Action Plan to step up efforts to counter disinformation in Europe and beyond.

[Indicative media programme – European Council, 13 and 14 December 2018](#)

Your request will be handled by the Press Office of the General Secretariat of the Council in accordance with the provisions of Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by the Community institutions and bodies and on the free movement of such data.

Your data will be stored in the database until you unsubscribe from the service.

Certain data (name, e-mail address, preferred language, media name, media type) may be disclosed to the press offices of the European institutions, the Permanent Representations of the Member States and to European Union agencies, under the conditions laid down in Articles 7 and 8 of Regulation 45/2001.

If there is data which you would not like to be stored, please let us know at: [\[email protected\]](#)