

Eurogroup Statement on the Draft Budgetary Plans for 2019

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The Eurogroup welcomes that all 19 Member States have submitted Draft Budgetary Plans (DBPs) for 2019. Greece is part of this exercise for the first time, following the end of the macro-economic adjustment programme. On 21 November, the Commission provided in-depth individual assessments and Opinions, together with an analysis of the budgetary situation in the euro area as a whole.

We note that Luxembourg, Latvia and Slovenia submitted DBPs on a no-policy-change basis. We invite them to submit the updates of their DBPs as soon as possible and look forward to the Commission assessment of those updates.

The euro area is entering its sixth year of growth, although growth has peaked and downside risks have increased. The strength of the domestic drivers is supportive of the continued activity growth and unemployment reduction. According to the Commission autumn forecast, the aggregate deficit in the euro area is expected to further decline from 1% in 2017 to 0.6% of GDP in 2018, although an increase to 0.8% of GDP is forecast in 2019. For the first time since the introduction of the euro, in 2019 no euro area Member State is expected to have a deficit above 3% of GDP. Aggregate debt in the euro area is set to be on a downward path, from 89% of GDP in 2017 to 87% of GDP in 2018 and 85% of GDP in 2019.

Current economic conditions call for the urgent need to rebuild fiscal buffers, notably in Member States that have not reached their Medium-Term Budgetary Objectives (MTO). The Eurogroup reiterates that a slow pace of debt reduction from high levels in a number of Member States remains a matter for concern and should be decisively addressed. In this context, the fiscal expansion or limited structural fiscal adjustment expected in some Member States in 2019 is worrying, in particular when coupled with high medium term sustainability risks. The Eurogroup recalls in this context that the focus on sufficient debt reduction and the adjustment towards the MTO are an integral part of the Stability and Growth Pact (SGP). The Eurogroup also recalls that country-specific recommendations adopted by the Council on 13 July 2018 include detailed and quantified fiscal policy guidance, taking into account the need to strengthen the growth potential and sustainability concerns.

The Eurogroup underlines that Member States are in very different budgetary situations.

The Eurogroup recalls that in its opinion issued on 23 October 2018 the

Commission identified a particularly serious non-compliance with the recommendation addressed to Italy by the Council on 13 July 2018 and requested a revised DBP. Italy submitted a revised DBP on 13 November, on which the Commission issued another opinion on 21 November, confirming the existence of a particularly serious non-compliance with the Council recommendation. We support the Commission assessment and recommend Italy to take the necessary measures to be compliant with the SGP. We also support the ongoing dialogue between the Commission and the Italian authorities.

The Eurogroup takes note that, according to the Commission assessment, five Member States' plans are deemed to be at risk of non-compliance with the SGP in 2019: Belgium, France, Portugal, Slovenia, under the preventive arm of the SGP and Spain, assessed under the assumption of a timely and durable correction of the excessive deficit. According to the Commission assessment, the DBPs of these Member States might result in a significant deviation from the adjustment path towards their respective MTOs. In addition, Belgium, France, Portugal and Spain are not expected to comply prima facie with the debt reduction benchmark in 2019. The Eurogroup invites all these Member States to consider in a timely manner the necessary additional measures to address the risks identified by the Commission and to ensure that their 2019 budget will be compliant with SGP provisions.

Based on the Commission assessment, three Member States' plans are deemed to be broadly compliant with the SGP in 2019: Estonia, Latvia and Slovakia, all under the preventive arm of the SGP. The Eurogroup invites these Member States to ensure compliance with SGP provisions within the national budgetary processes and welcomes their commitment to take any necessary measures.

The Eurogroup welcomes that ten Member States' plans are deemed to be compliant with the SGP in 2019: Austria, Cyprus, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta and Netherlands, all under the preventive arm of the SGP. The Eurogroup also welcomes that some of the Member States that have outperformed their medium term objectives have plans to partly use their favourable budgetary situation in 2019 to boost investment and growth, while preserving the long-term sustainability of public finances.

We will continue to monitor euro area Member States' fiscal and economic policies, as well as the budgetary situation of the euro area as a whole.

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Promoting combined transport – Council agrees its negotiating stance

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The EU is promoting combined transport as a way to transfer some long-distance freight from lorries to greener means of transport such as barges, ships and trains. The Council today agreed on its position (general approach) on a proposal which clarifies the current rules for combined transport and makes it more competitive compared to road-only freight transport.

This reform creates better conditions for combined transport so that it can compete more easily with pure road freight. It is good for everyone since it will result in improved air quality and less road congestion.

Norbert Hofer, Minister for Transport, Innovation and Technology of Austria, President of the Council

The draft directive revises the 1992 combined transport directive, which is the only legal instrument at EU level which provides for direct incentives to encourage a modal shift in goods transport.

Under the Council's general approach, the new rules will apply to international combined transport operations, namely those carried out between EU countries, or between an EU country and a non-EU country. This essentially maintains the scope of the current directive, but the inclusion, under certain conditions, of operations that are partly carried out in third countries is clarified.

The reform will provide extra flexibility on the length of the road leg, so as to allow the nearest suitable transshipment terminal to be reached. It will also clarify the evidence requirements for combined transport operations and extend economic support measures, in particular regarding investment in transshipment terminals.

The Council position allows member states to decide on certain limitations relating to cabotage, including a maximum 5-day time limitation for the continuous presence of vehicles on their territory, in order to avoid misuse of cabotage through the provision of unlimited services.

The Commission presented its proposal in November 2017 as part of the second mobility package.

Today's agreement opens the way for negotiations to begin with the European Parliament.

The full text of the Council's position ('general approach') will be made available on this webpage.

[Capital markets union: Council agrees stance on supervision framework for clearing houses](#)

Roaming charges ended in the European Union on 15 June 2017. Europeans travelling within EU countries will 'Roam Like at Home' and pay domestic prices for roaming calls, SMS and data. ...

On 23 June 2016 citizens of the United Kingdom (UK) voted to leave the European Union (EU). On 29 March 2017 the UK formally notified the European Council of its intention to leave the EU by...

Over the past 20 years, the European Union has put in place some of the highest common asylum standards in the world. And in the past two years, European migration policy has advanced in leaps and...

'Europe will not be made all at once, or according to a single plan. It will be built through concrete achievements which first create a de facto solidarity.' Robert Schuman 9 May 1950 on 25 March 2017, ...

In response to the illegal annexation of Crimea and deliberate destabilisation of a neighbouring sovereign country, the EU has imposed restrictive measures against the Russian Federation. ...

Enlargement is the process whereby countries join the EU. Since it was founded in 1957, the EU has grown from 6 member countries to 28. Any European country that respects the principles of liberty, ...

[Vice-President Šefčovič at the COP24 – EU Leaders Summit](#)

Opening Speech by Vice-President Šefčovič, in charge of Energy Union, at the COP24 – EU Leaders Summit, in Katowice, Poland

Mr President,

Your Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted that the Conference of the Parties is once again taking place in Europe. Katowice symbolises the industrial revolutions of the past and of the future. The city saw the rapid industrialisation of the 19th century and now is part of the new revolution – into a clean, sustainable, fair, and eventually climate-neutral economy.

This revolution is well under way here and all across Europe.

I am proud that the European Union has now translated its commitments under the Paris Agreement into a set of binding laws. We are the first major economy to do so. We are set to reap the dividends of being a first mover on climate action.

Since 1990, our greenhouse gas emissions dropped by 22%. This is more than our 2020 target, already today. By the end of the next decade, this reduction will reach at least 45%. Moreover, we have proven that it is possible to cut emissions and at the same time, to grow our economy – by 58% so far. It's not one or the other.

Having said that, let me say loud and clear: this is not sufficient. The IPCC special report is yet the latest alarming wake-up call, stressing that every bit of warming matters and urgent action is needed to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius – if we want to keep our planet safe.

Europe is set not only to contribute but to lead. But it takes vision, courage, commitment.

Vision:

I am proud the European Union is the first major economy that has taken a bold step towards climate neutrality by mid-century.

We have outlined a visionary strategy for economic and societal transformation – involving all sectors of economy – that would lead to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Courage:

It will of course require additional investment – of some 0.8% of our GDP. But the good news is that this objective is achievable based on existing technological solutions. And more good news is that it can increase our growth by 2%.

And imagine, what we can achieve with technologies of tomorrow. What seemed to be impossible just yesterday is a reality today.

This transition will boost growth and jobs in many sectors. Green jobs in the

EU already amount to 4 million. But for some sectors, the transition can be difficult and therefore, we want to invest massively into upskilling. Social fairness is in our DNA, like we are showing in coal regions in Europe – working jointly on future-proof economic models.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Equally, we will not forget the most vulnerable parts of the world. Because our climate action is not inward-looking and because climate change doesn't know borders.

And this is our commitment. The EU remains committed to the collective global goal to mobilise USD 100 billion a year – public and private – by 2020 and through to 2025 to finance climate action in developing countries.

Last year, the European Union, its Member States and the European Investment Bank together provided a total EUR 20.4 billion in climate finance in third countries, making the European Union the world's biggest climate finance donor.

I pledge from here that the EU will continue to support climate mitigation and adaptation in developing countries. I call on all other countries that can do so to scale up climate finance. As the motto of COP24 says: 'Changing together'. So let's!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Europe comes to Katowice bringing a solid track record, and with the aim to make further global progress.

This year's UN climate conference is a credibility test. We must put the landmark Paris Agreement into practice by adopting a detailed rulebook that works. This will be a solid foundation helping all of us redouble our efforts back home.

It is our duty to get our climate back under control. And it is our chance to modernise our economic future.

We have a lot of weight to lift.

It will take vision, courage, and commitment.

And we will find this courage if we look at our planet with the care it deserves, as our home, our garden, our community.

Thank you very much.

Daily News 03 / 12 / 2018

First direct support to private company in Latvia under the Juncker Plan through EFSI financing to manufacturer HansaMatrix

The European Investment Bank signed a €10 million financing agreement with Latvian electronic system development and manufacturing company HansaMatrix. This agreement was made possible by the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), the heart of the Juncker Plan. The financing will support HansaMatrix's growth strategy based on the expansion of its manufacturing capacities and the ongoing shift from manufacturing to offering a full range of services. The financing will also help the company boost its research and development activities. This is the first direct EFSI financing to a private company in the country, and comes on top of over 7,300 SMEs already financed in Latvia through intermediary banks and funds. All investments will be located in Latvia, at the company's existing sites near Riga, Pārogre and Ventspils. Commission Vice-President Valdis **Dombrovskis** said: *"I'm pleased to see that financing under the Juncker Plan is also now going to the private companies of the manufacturing sector. I hope that more Latvian companies follow the same example soon, as the Juncker Plan represents an opportunity for businesses to get access to much needed finance, launch new products and expand beyond their local markets."* By November 2018, the Investment Plan had already mobilised €360 billion of investment across Europe, including almost €960 million in Latvia, and supported 850,000 small and medium businesses. A press release is available [here](#). (For more information: Annika Breidthardt – Tel.: +32 229-56153; Sophie Dupin de Saint-Cyr – Tel.: +32 229 56169)

Le très haut débit s'étend à La Réunion grâce à la politique de Cohésion

Plus de 50 millions d'euros du Fonds Européen de Développement Régional (FEDER) sont investis pour continuer à déployer l'internet très haut débit sur l'île de La Réunion. Devant l'obsolescence croissante des infrastructures numériques actuellement en place dans cette région ultrapériphérique française, une transition vers le très haut débit, soutenue par l'UE, permettra à La Réunion de réduire la fracture numérique avec le reste de l'Europe, maintenir son avance dans la zone océan indien, soutenir la croissance de la filière des technologies de l'information et de la communication et développer les usages numériques. Ce projet contribuera également à réduire la facture internet des 850 000 habitants de l'île, avec des coûts d'accès moins élevés qu'avec les structures actuelles. La commissaire à la politique régionale Corina **Crețu** a commenté: *"Ce projet financé par l'UE contribuera à améliorer concrètement la qualité de vie des Réunionnais et à apporter de nouvelles opportunités économiques pour tous. Je sais à quel point le développement économique de La Réunion est une question centrale aujourd'hui. Cet investissement de l'UE est une preuve concrète de l'engagement de l'UE pour la compétitivité et l'emploi à La Réunion sur le long terme"*. Ce projet fait partie du Schéma Directeur Territorial d'Aménagement Numérique de La Réunion dont l'objectif consiste à atteindre

une couverture totale du territoire en très haut débit d'ici 2026. Plus d'informations sur la nouvelle stratégie de l'UE pour les régions ultrapériphériques sont disponibles [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Christian Spahr – Tél.: [+32 2 295 00 55](tel:+3222950055); Sophie Dupin de Saint-Cyr – Tél.: +32 229 56169)

Commission welcomes progress made in adopting next EU research and innovation budget

The Commission welcomes the [partial general approach](#) reached by the Council on the next EU funding programme for research and innovation [Horizon Europe](#), which will run from 2021 to 2027. In June this year, the Commission proposed the most ambitious research and innovation programme ever, with a budget of €100 billion. Horizon Europe will build on the achievements and success of the previous research and innovation programme (Horizon 2020) and keep the EU at the forefront of global research and innovation. Carlos **Moedas**, Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation, said: *“Horizon 2020 is one of the EU’s biggest success stories. The new Horizon Europe programme aims even higher. So I am pleased to see progress on our proposal, which will push Europe’s scientific leadership and capacity for ground-breaking innovation even further. I invite the co-legislators to start discussions in order to reach a common position without delay.”* The agreement does not cover the budgetary aspects yet, given that the final amounts will depend on the agreement reached on the total EU budget for 2021 to 2027. A number of other issues of a horizontal nature have also been set aside pending progress in related files such as InvestEU or Structural Funds. (For more information: Lucía Caudet – Tel .: +32 229 56182; Victoria Von Hammerstein – Tel.: +32 229 55040)

Eurogroup and ECOFIN meetings, 3 and 4 December 2018

Vice-President **Dombrovskis** and Commissioner **Moscovici** will represent the Commission at today’s Eurogroup meeting. Ministers will discuss the Opinions adopted by the Commission on the Draft Budgetary Plans of euro area Member States. The Commission will present the first report for Greece under the enhanced surveillance framework that was put in place following the conclusion of the European Stability Mechanism stability support programme. The Commission and the European Central Bank will present the main findings of the tenth post-programme surveillance mission to Spain and the fifth post-programme surveillance mission to Cyprus. The International Monetary Fund will present the main findings from its euro area Article IV interim mission. The Eurogroup will then continue in an inclusive format to discuss the state of play of the ongoing work on the deepening of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), including the [completion of the Banking Union](#), ahead of the Euro Summit on 14 December. Commissioner **Moscovici** will participate in the press conference following the meeting. At tomorrow’s ECOFIN meeting, the Commission will again be represented by Vice-President **Dombrovskis** and Commissioner **Moscovici**. Ministers will debate the final compromise text of the [digital services tax the Commission proposed this March](#) as part of a wider effort to address gaps in the taxation of the digital economy.

Following the discussion on the deepening of the European Monetary Union at the Eurogroup the day before, ministers will take note of progress in completing the Banking Union, in particular concerning the European Deposit Insurance Scheme. In this context, Ministers are expected to endorse the result of the informal trilogue negotiation on key risk reduction measures of the banking package. The Commission will then present the latest, [encouraging data on the reduction of non-performing loans](#) (NPLs) in the EU banking sector and will report on its successful delivery of all the initiatives mandated by the [Council's July 2017 action plan on tackling NPLs](#). Following the publication of its [Communication](#) last week, the Commission will also renew its calls for more intensive political engagement on the key building blocks of the [Capital Markets Union \(CMU\)](#) ahead of the European elections next May. The Council is due to adopt conclusions setting out an action plan on anti-money laundering, which will present a number of short-term actions. Finally, ministers will be called on to formally adopt without discussion new rules [to improve the day-to-day running of the EU's VAT system](#). A press conference with Vice-President **Dombrovskis** will follow the meeting. *(For more information: Annika Breidthardt – Tel.: +32 229-56153; Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Letizia Lupini – Tel.: +32 229 51958; Enda McNamara – Tel.: +32 229 64976; Patrick McCullough – Tel.: +32 229 87183)*

UN climate conference in Katowice: EU aims for adoption of rules for implementing Paris Agreement

This year's UN climate conference will be a key moment for implementation of the Paris Agreement, with Parties aiming to finalise detailed rules that will enable the landmark accord to be put into practice across the world. The 24th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change – 'COP24' – is taking place from 3-14 December in Katowice, Poland, presided over by the Polish government. It will bring together ministers and government officials, as well as a wide range of stakeholder representatives. The Vice-President for Energy Union, Maroš **Šefčovič** will be representing the Commission today at the high level opening ceremony. Just last week, the Commission presented a strategic vision on how the EU could achieve climate neutrality by 2050. This stands us in a good stead to enter the negotiations, which start at political level next week. The EU will be represented at the negotiations by the chief climate negotiator Miguel **Arias Cañete** and Elisabeth Köstinger, Minister for Sustainability and Tourism of Austria, which currently holds the EU Council Presidency. The Questions and Answers are available online in [EN](#), [FR](#), [DE](#). *(For more information: Anna-Kaisa Itkonen – Tel.: +32 229 56186; Lynn Rietdorf – Tel.: +32 229 74959)*

A Europe that Protects: Stronger rules criminalising money laundering enter into force

Today, the new measures to counter money laundering by criminal law enter into force across the EU. The new rules will ensure that dangerous criminals and terrorists face equally severe penalties for money laundering wherever they are in the EU, with a minimum term of imprisonment of 4 years. Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris **Avramopoulos** said: *"If we want to catch criminals and terrorists, we have to follow the money. Today, we are beefing up the EU's response to money*

laundering, making sure that criminals and terrorists no longer get away with illegally gained money and face deserved justice. A Europe that protects is a Europe that effectively prevents and prosecutes criminals.” Commissioner for the Security Union Julian King said: “Money laundering is a key tool used by terrorists and serious criminals to obtain funding – by harmonising the crime and the punishment across the EU, we can further close down the space in which they operate. Member States now need to implement the new rules without delay.” The Commission proposed to harmonise offences and sanctions for money laundering across the EU in December 2017. While all Member States currently criminalise money laundering the definitions of this crime as well as the penalties related to it differ across the EU, allowing criminals to effectively “window shop” and exploit the differences between national legislation. With the new rules in force that will be no longer possible. Member States now have 24 months to implement the new rules into national law and notify the Commission accordingly. (For more information: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456 ; Katarzyna Kolanko – Tel.: +32 299 63444)

REACH: New criteria helps companies better assess safety and impact of nanomaterials

Today, the European Commission adopted the revision of several Annexes of the [EU Regulation on Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals \(REACH\)](#), clarifying the registration requirements with regard to nanomaterials. Nanomaterials are chemical substances in a particular form (“nanoform”) with special features at the “nanoscale” between 1 nm and 100 nm. Due in part to these special features, nanomaterials can be used in many different and innovative ways, for example in catalysts, electronics, solar panels, batteries, in materials science and biomedical applications. REACH has always applied to nanomaterials, but did not contain specific provisions for them, which is why companies often did not know how to register these “substances in nanoform”. Scientific evidence has shown that the toxicity of nanoforms as well as their effect on the environment often differs from the conventional substance. The new registration requirements for nanomaterials will apply as of 1 January 2020. They will help close the knowledge gap about which nanomaterials are placed on the market and in which quantities. They will also provide information on their basic characteristics and use, how to handle them safely, what risks they potentially pose to health and the environment and how these risks can be adequately controlled. More detailed information on the presence and perspectives of products containing nanomaterials can be found at the [European Observatory for Nanomaterials](#). More information on the revision of the Annexes is available [online](#). (For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel.: + 32 229 56185; Daniela Stoycheva – Tel.: +32 229 53664)

Publication of latest agri-food trade figures: EU trade surplus still strong

The [latest monthly agri-food trade report](#) published today shows that the EU maintained a monthly agri-food trade surplus of €2.2 billion in September 2018 in spite of a modest decline in export values of 6% compared with September 2017. The highest increases in monthly export values (September

2018 compared to September 2017) were recorded for Egypt (an increase €61 million), Algeria (up €34 million) and South Korea (a gain of €26 million). In contrast, exports to China dropped significantly (by €131 million). There were also drops in exports to both Hong Kong and Turkey. While there was an increase in exports for feed and feed ingredients and for preparations of vegetables, fruit and nuts, exports of raw hides, fur skins, wheat and other cereals experienced decreases. Imports from Brazil, the USA, Russia and Ukraine performed particularly well. Looking at the last 12 months from October 2017 to September 2017, agri-food export surplus remains at €21 billion. Wine, sugar, spirits and liqueurs are sectors that keep exporting significant quantities and values. The [monthly report](#) provides a table presenting the trade balance and its development by product category from October 2016 to September 2018. *(For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel: +32 2 29 56185; Clémence Robin – Tel: +32 229 52 509)*

La Commission approuve une nouvelle indication géographique protégée de Roumanie

La Commission européenne a approuvé la demande d'inscription du [«Scrumbie de Dunăre afumată»](#) dans le registre des indications géographiques protégées (AOP). Le «Scrumbie de Dunăre afumată» est un poisson fumé du delta du Danube fait à partir de l'alose de la mer Noire. Le fumage à froid est traditionnellement employé afin de retenir une grande quantité des matières grasses de ce poisson, qui est pour sa taille, le plus gras du monde. Pour les populations locales du delta du Danube, la pêche est l'activité la plus ancienne et la plus importante, et le «Scrumbie de Dunăre afumată» en est emblématique. Cette nouvelle appellation va rejoindre plus de 1440 produits (hors vins et spiritueux) déjà protégés dont la liste est disponible dans la base de données [DOOR](#). Pour plus d'informations, voir aussi les pages sur la [politique de qualité](#). *(Pour plus d'informations: Daniel Rosario – Tél: +32 2 29 56185; Clémence Robin – Tél: +32 229 52 509)*

State aid: Commission approves Cypriot “ESTIA” scheme to support households at risk of losing their home due to difficulties in mortgage repayments

The European Commission has approved under EU State aid rules the Cypriot “ESTIA” scheme to support private households and micro-companies that have encountered difficulties in repaying mortgage loans and risk losing their primary residence. The scheme, which has an annual budget of around € 33 million, sets strict eligibility criteria in terms of the value of the primary residence and income of the borrower to ensure it is targeted at those in need. Eligible borrowers will receive a grant equivalent to one third of their monthly loan payment, provided that (i) their loans are secured against their primary residence; and (ii) they resume paying the other two thirds of their monthly payment. If the borrower stops servicing its loan, it is foreseen that the bank initiates the foreclosure of the property. All participating banks will have to restructure the loans of eligible borrowers along the same requirements defined by the State. The Commission concluded that, with respect to individuals and micro companies, the measure does not involve any State aid. With respect to the banks that issued the loans, the Commission found that the scheme will provide an indirect advantage because it increases the amount of repayment

the banks are likely to receive from the non-performing loans. At the same time, the Commission's assessment showed that this indirect aid would not create undue distortions of competition because the aid is limited to what is necessary to achieve its objective of ensuring that borrowers do not lose the house in which they live. Moreover, since all mortgage lenders established in Cyprus are able to participate in the scheme, it is non-discriminatory among banks. The Commission has therefore concluded that the scheme is well-targeted and limited in time and scope as required by EU rules. Finally, the scheme is expected to contribute to reduce the high burden of non-performing loans in the Cypriot banking sector. More information will be available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the public [case register](#) under the case number SA.49554. (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Giulia Astuti – Tel.: +32 229 55344)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Hospital Topco by Centerbridge

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of Hospital Topco Limited of the UK by Centerbridge Partners, L.P. ("Centerbridge") of the US. Hospital Topco is the parent company of the healthcare group operating under the BMI Healthcare brand and the property interest holding companies. Centerbridge is an investment management firm focused on private equity and distressed investment opportunities. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns because of the limited impact it would have 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.9160](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Concentrations: la Commission autorise l'acquisition des activités presse du groupe Lagardère par Czech Media Invest

La Commission européenne a approuvé, en vertu du règlement européen sur les concentrations, le projet d'acquisition des activités presse du groupe français Lagardère (via Hachette Filipacchi Associés, Lagardère Publicité et Lagardère Digital France), à l'exception des titres *Journal du Dimanche* et *Paris Match* et des noms de produits ou marques *Elle*, par le groupe Czech Media Invest ("CMI") de Tchéquie. Hachette Filipacchi Associés, Lagardère Publicité et Lagardère Digital France sont actifs dans la publication de magazines français, l'édition de sites internet associés, ainsi que la vente d'espaces publicitaires sur ces médias. CMI est actif dans la publication de titres de presse, l'édition de sites internet associés, l'édition de services de radio, ainsi que la vente d'espaces publicitaires sur ces médias dans les pays d'Europe centrale et orientale. La Commission a conclu que l'acquisition envisagée ne soulèverait pas de problème de concurrence compte tenu de son impact très limité sur la structure du marché. L'opération a été examinée dans le cadre de la procédure simplifiée du contrôle des concentrations. De plus amples informations sont disponibles sur le site internet [concurrence](#) de la Commission, dans le [registre public](#) des affaires sous le numéro d'affaire [M.9156](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Ricardo Cardoso – Tél.: +32 229 80100;

Maria Tsoni – Tél.: +32 229 90526)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of SodaStream by PepsiCo

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of SodaStream International Ltd of Israel by PepsiCo Inc. of the US. SodaStream is active in the manufacturing of home carbonation systems, while PepsiCo is a major player in the beverage market. The Commission found that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns because there are no or only limited overlaps and links between the activities of the companies. The Commission investigated also potential conglomerate issues due to PepsiCo's activity and potential expansion in the production of dilutable concentrates, syrups and flavours that might be used with SodaStream's home carbonation systems to produce home-made soda. However, the Commission concluded that conglomerate effects are unlikely due to the specific characteristics of the products, which are designed to work with all alternatives offered by competitors. The transaction was examined under the normal merger review procedure. More information is available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the public [case register](#) under the case number [M.9108](#). *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)*

Concentrations: la Commission approuve la création d'une entreprise commune par Meridiam et CDC

La Commission Européenne a autorisé, en vertu du règlement européen sur les concentrations, l'acquisition du contrôle conjoint de l'entreprise commune nouvellement créée par les entreprises Meridiam Transition ("Meridiam") et Caisse des dépôts et consignations ("CDC"), toutes trois basées en France. L'entreprise commune construira et exploitera une usine de production de granulés destinés au secteur industriel, résidentiel et à la cogénération, ainsi qu'une centrale de cogénération produisant de l'électricité et de la chaleur. Meridiam est un fond d'investissement dédié à des projets d'infrastructures dans les domaines des énergies renouvelables, de l'efficacité énergétique, des services énergétiques locaux et des réseaux électriques et gaziers. CDC est une institution publique active dans le financement de projets d'intérêt général, la prise de participations dans des secteurs ouverts à la concurrence et la gestion de fonds. La Commission a conclu que la concentration envisagée ne soulevait pas de problème de concurrence du fait que l'entreprise commune ne prévoit d'exercer qu'une activité négligeable sur le territoire de l'Espace Economique Européen. La transaction a été examinée selon la procédure simplifiée de contrôle des concentrations. De plus amples informations sont disponibles sur le [site internet concurrence](#) de la Commission, dans le [registre public](#) des affaires sous le numéro d'affaire [M.9153](#). *(Pour plus d'informations: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

European Commission hosts high-level conference on tackling discrimination and intolerance against Muslims in the EU

The European Commission hosts today a high-level conference to address intolerance, hate speech and discrimination affecting Muslims in the EU. The event brings together national authorities, international organisations as well as representatives of civil society and of the religious communities. First Vice-President **Timmermans** said: *“Recent surveys show that intolerance towards Muslims is growing in the EU and the protection of their basic fundamental rights is being challenged. In our European vision there is no place for discrimination against any minority. After all, we are all minorities in the European Union.”* Věra **Jourová**, Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, added: *“Discrimination, acts of intolerance or racism against the 25 million Muslims living in the EU is a violation of their fundamental rights, but it also fuels marginalisation and self-exclusion. We need to fight this intolerance and discrimination, as these only make us weaker and more fragile.”* On the occasion of this event, the [Fundamental Rights Agency](#) (FRA) will present a new [database](#) providing an overview of hate crime, hate speech and discrimination against Muslims in the EU from 2012 to 2017. Follow the Commission’s work on [combating racism and xenophobia](#), [hate speech online](#) and [anti-Muslim hatred](#) (For more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Mélanie Voin – Tel.: +32 229 5865)

Vice-President Ansip participates in Cyber Security Conference in Vienna

The European Commission together with the [Austrian Presidency of the Council of the EU](#) are organising a [Cyber Security Conference](#) on 3 and 4 December 2018 in Vienna. Vice-President for the Digital Single Market, Andrus **Ansip**, will participate in the conference where he will stress the need to agree on the [Cybersecurity Act](#) in December and will urge all Member States to increase their efforts in building their national capacity against cybersecurity threats and to cooperate with each other. Securing network and information systems is essential to keep the online economy and society running and to ensure prosperity. For this purpose, the Commission proposed in September 2017 a wide-ranging set of measures to deal with cyber-attacks and to build strong cybersecurity in the EU. This included the [cybersecurity package](#), a proposal for strengthening the EU Agency for Cybersecurity, and a new European certification scheme, ensuring that products and services in the digital world are cybersecure. It is currently being discussed by the co-legislators, the Council and the European Parliament. (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tél .: +32 229 67083; Marietta Grammenou- Tél .: +32 229 83583; Joseph Waldstein – Tel.: +32 229 56184)

Commissioner Jourová hosts a high-level conference concluding the Stop violence against women campaign

Today, Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality Věra **Jourová** is hosting a high-level [conference](#) on “Ending Violence Against Women – Taking Stock and Next Steps”, which concludes the campaign No.non.nein Say No! Stop violence against women, launched by the Commission in 2017. The Commissioner will also award a prize to a video raising awareness on this topic, following a competition addressed to young professionals and students to shoot an awareness-raising video targeting bystanders of violence.

Commissioner **Jourová** said: “Violence against women doesn’t belong to Europe and we all have a role to play to address it. I am glad the campaign is supporting training of police officers, social workers or lawyers amongst others. Women victims of violence can only be truly protected if all relevant actors are on board.” Throughout the campaign, the Commission provided 15 million euro of funding to support local governments, lawyers, doctors or police officers and civil society organisations to finance concrete projects and raise awareness. Today’s High Level Conference brings ministers and representatives from international organisations, civil society actors and activists to look at what has been achieved, learn from the good practices at grassroots’ and national level, and discuss future actions. Information about the campaign is available on the [No.non.nein #SayNoStopVAW website](#). (For more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Mélanie Voin – Tel.: +32 229 5865)

Commissioners Thyssen and Navracsics hand out 2019 Access City Awards

Tomorrow, 4 December, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne **Thyssen**, and Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sports, Tibor **Navracsics**, will hand out the [2019 Access City Awards](#). These Awards, organised by the European Commission together with the European Disability Forum, is one of the actions of the [EU Disability Strategy 2010-2020](#) to create a barrier-free Europe. It recognises those cities that are leading lights in overcoming obstacles across Europe today. The winners of the Awards will be made public tomorrow following the ceremony by means of a press release, [published here](#). Furthermore, the award ceremony will conclude the [conference on the European Day of Persons with Disabilities](#) which takes place today and tomorrow, 3 and 4 December, in Brussels. This year’s conference will address several topics such as the path towards a new Disability Strategy, the Multi-annual Financial Framework and, marking the European Year of Cultural Heritage, the accessibility of cultural heritage. More information on the EU’s efforts to improve the lives of persons with disabilities and create a more inclusive society is available [here](#). (For more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: + 32 229 67094)

Le commissaire Mimica se rend à Cotonou, au Bénin

Le commissaire en charge de la coopération internationale et du développement, Neven **Mimica**, est aujourd’hui à Cotonou, au [Bénin](#), pour participer à la 36^{ème} session de [l’Assemblée parlementaire paritaire Afrique-Caraïbes-Pacifique / Union européenne](#). Lors de sa visite, le commissaire **Mimica** rencontrera également le Président du Bénin, Patrice Talon. Tous deux discuteront des moyens pour renforcer le partenariat UE-Bénin afin de stimuler les investissements privés et la création d’emplois, dans le cadre de la nouvelle “[Alliance Afrique-Europe pour des investissements et des emplois durables](#)” lancée en septembre 2018 par le président **Juncker**. (Pour plus d’informations: Carlos Martin Ruiz De

Gordejuela – Tél.: +32 229 65322; Christina Wunder – Tél.: +32 229 92256)

Commissioner Stylianides in Nicosia, Cyprus to receive the “Yannos Kranidiotis” Award

Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos **Stylianides** is in Nicosia, Cyprus today to deliver a speech at a ceremony during which he will receive the “Yannos Kranidiotis Award” for his contribution to the European project. Tomorrow Commissioner **Stylianides** will meet with Mr Nikos Anastasiades, President of the Republic of Cyprus. During his visit the Commissioner will also meet with academics of the University of Nicosia Medical School and with representatives of the NGO, REACTION to present [rescEU](#), the Commission’s proposal to strengthen the European system of disaster response. *(For more information: Carlos Martin Ruiz de Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Daniel Puglisi – Tel.: +32 229 69140)*

ICT 2018 event is about shaping the digital transformation of Europe’s societies and economies

From 4 – 6 December the European Commission and the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union will hold [ICT 2018 Imagine Digital – Connect Europe\(#ICT2018\)](#), a flagship event that will rally in Vienna more than 5000 European researchers, business people, investors, bloggers and policymakers. [#ICT2018](#) will showcase tomorrow’s robots, applications and objects and will present the latest news on EU research and innovation policies in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as well as funding opportunities. Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, Mariya **Gabriel**, who will be at the conference, said: *“ICT2018 shows the creativity and excellence of European researchers. But our next challenge is to turn their results into successful products and companies, to give new opportunities to citizens and to benefit the whole economy. That is why we need to invest in skills and help for more companies to use the new technologies, for example artificial intelligence.”* The [ICT 2018 conference](#) will discuss the key areas of [the Digital Europe Programme](#) proposed in May 2018 by the Commission in the context of the next EU long-term budget for 2021-2027: high-performance computing, artificial Intelligence, cybersecurity and trust, advanced digital skills and eGovernment. Furthermore, during the event more than 100 networking sessions will take place, while the [Innovation and Startups forum](#) will bring together market-oriented innovators and investors, and present marketable results from EU-funded projects. Commissioner Gabriel and Austrian Minister of Transport, Innovation and Technology Norbert Hofer will also award prizes for the [Innovation Radar](#), [Digital Skills](#) and [FIWARE](#) challenges. For more information check the [Media room](#). *(For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Marietta Grammenou- Tel.: +32 229 83583; Joseph Waldstein – Tel.: +32 229 56184)*

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