

Expanding and strengthening Erasmus+: Council agrees its position

Studying abroad will become easier for Europe's youth

The Council today adopted its position (partial general approach) on the Erasmus+ programme for 2021-2027. The proposed regulation will expand the offer of learning opportunities in Europe and beyond to more people compared to the current period. It will also be extended to include all levels of education and training. To underline its inclusive approach, the Council has maintained the current name of the programme "Erasmus+". Today's agreement does not cover the budgetary aspects of the draft regulation, since the final amounts will depend on the agreement reached on the next multiannual financial framework.

Erasmus+ is about investing in people. By expanding learning mobility and exchanges, the programme will make an even more important contribution to the personal, educational and professional development of many individuals. It is also an important tool for generating economic growth and creating jobs across Europe.

Heinz FASSMANN, Federal Minister for Education, Science and Research of Austria

The Erasmus+ programme plays a crucial role in the development of a European Education Area. At the European Council meeting in December 2017 EU leaders called for stepping up mobility and exchanges, including through a substantially strengthened, inclusive and extended Erasmus+ programme. This new regulation responds to this call by:

- offering learning mobility to a record number of people
- increasing the accessibility for young people with fewer opportunities
- increasing the accessibility for small and grass-roots organisations
- maintaining the integrated nature of the programme, covering learning in all contexts – formal, non-formal and informal

Background

Erasmus is one of the most popular and successful EU programmes. Launched 30 years ago it has helped over 9 million people to study, work or volunteer abroad. Under Erasmus more than 2 000 transnational partnerships are established each year.

Next steps

The agreement reached by the Council will serve as the basis for negotiations with the European Parliament. The decision on the financial allocations for Erasmus+ for 2021-2027 will depend on the agreement on the next MFF.

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[Expanding and strengthening Erasmus+: Council agrees its position](#)

EU27 leaders met for a special meeting of the European Council (Art.50) on Sunday 25 November 2018. They endorsed the Brexit withdrawal agreement, as presented by the negotiators of the EU and the UK. Leaders also approved the political declaration on future EU-UK relations, which accompanies and is referred to in the withdrawal agreement.

[EASO publishes four COI reports on Nigeria](#)

Today, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) published four Country of Origin Information (COI) Reports on Nigeria: [Security Situation](#), [Actors of Protection](#), [Targeting Individuals](#), and [Key Socio-economic indicators](#). The reports provide information relevant for the protection status determination of Nigerian asylum seekers.

*In 2017, Nigeria was the fourth most common country of origin in the EU+ countries with a total number of close to **42,000** applicants. In 2018, following a substantial decrease in the number of irregular arrivals in the central Mediterranean, far fewer asylum applications were lodged by Nigerian nationals in EU+ countries. Despite this decrease, Nigeria remained in the top-five among all countries of origin of applicants in the EU+ with about **21,500** applicants recorded between January and October 2018. At the end of October 2018, around **25,000 cases** awaited a first-instance decision.*

The EASO COI report [Nigeria Security Situation](#), following a brief and general

introduction to Nigeria provides a general description of the security situation in Nigeria. The first chapter gives an overview of the recent conflicts in the country; actors in the conflict; recent security trends and armed confrontations; the impact of the violence on the civilian population and IDPs; and the impact of the violence on the state ability to secure law and order.

The main conflicts in Nigeria are elaborated upon in more detail in the second chapter. A general description at the level of the geopolitical zone contains information on the geography and population, and on the background of the conflict, including the actors active in the conflict. This is followed by a description of recent trends in the security situation, with regard to the nature of the violence, frequency, tactics and targets, locations and number of fatalities. Also the impact of the violence on the state's ability to secure law and order, and the impact on the population are discussed.

The report includes specific information on violent incidents and civilian casualties in the North East where Boko Haram is active. An increase is noted in the number of violent incidents in the North Central Zone and Kaduna State, where conflicts between herders and farmers are intensifying. By comparison, the Niger Delta saw a much lower number of fatalities than the two previous zones. Striking is the relatively low number of incidents but resulting in a high number of fatalities in Zamfara State, where cattle rustling and mass attacks on villages have soared since the beginning of 2018.

The EASO COI report [Nigeria Security Situation](#) was drafted by the Office for Country Information and Language Analysis (OCILA) of the Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Service, in accordance with the [EASO COI Report Methodology](#). It was reviewed by an expert from the International and European Affairs Unit, Department for Asylum and Migration Policy, Czech Republic. The external expert Nnamdi Obasi, Senior Advisor on Nigeria, International Crisis Group also reviewed this report, in order to ensure the highest quality. The EASO COI report [Nigeria Actors of Protection](#) provides information on the Constitution and the state's legal structure, the police and armed forces, the public prosecution institutions, the court system, the National Human Rights commission, the Public Complaints Commission – (the Ombudsman) and the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP).

The report highlights the complexity of the country's pluralist legal system, consisting of common law, Islamic law, customary law at federal, state, and local levels. Problematic capacity and integrity issues with the police and the national army are noted, leading to human rights abuses and corruption, as well as the high number of complaints received by the National Human Rights Commission, reaching one million over 2017.

The EASO COI report [Nigeria Actors of Protection](#) was drafted by the International and European Affairs Unit, Department for Asylum and Migration Policy, Czech Republic, in accordance with the [EASO COI Report Methodology](#). The report was reviewed by the Office for Country Information and Language Analysis (OCILA) of the Dutch Immigration and Naturalization Service. In

addition, the report was reviewed by the external expert Stella Amadi Odiase, Lawyer and International Development Practitioner, and by the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD).

The EASO COI report [Nigeria Targeting Individuals](#) is divided into two main sections, following a first brief and general introduction to Nigeria. The second chapter on actors discusses several non-state actors, such as Boko Haram, militant groups in the Niger Delta, student/university cults, traffickers, and state or state-affiliated actors.

The third chapter discusses 15 profiles of persons subject to targeting by one or more actors, or by society in general. These profiles, which sometimes overlap, include: persons targeted by Boko Haram, by university cults, members of militant groups in the Niger Delta, persons involved in herders-farmers conflict, religious minorities, persons affected by witchcraft and ritual killings, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) persons, women and children, and others.

The EASO COI report [Nigeria Targeting Individuals](#) was drafted by members of the Country of Origin Information (COI) sector in EASO, in accordance with the [EASO COI Report Methodology](#). The report was peer reviewed by Office for Country Information and Language Analysis (OCILA) of the Dutch Immigration and Naturalisation Service, and by Lifos, the Centre for Country of Origin Information and Analysis of the Swedish Migration Agency. In addition, the report was reviewed by the external expert Dr Megan Turnbull, Assistant Professor of Comparative Politics at the University of Georgia in the Department of International Affairs.

The EASO COI report [Nigeria Key Socio-economic indicators](#) is divided into two main sections, after a first brief and general introduction to Nigeria in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 provides information on the following key socio-economic indicators: demographics, economic growth, employment, poverty, food security, housing and living conditions, education, health care, social networks and support mechanisms.

A main emphasis, where information is available, is on the situation in Abuja and Lagos and on the socio-economic situation of women, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and returnees. The third chapter provides information on mobility and internal travel possibilities.

The EASO COI report [Nigeria Key Socio-economic indicators](#) was drafted by the Country of Origin Information (COI) sector in EASO, in accordance with the [EASO COI Report Methodology](#). The report was peer reviewed by Lifos, the Centre for Country of Origin Information and Analysis of the Swedish Migration Agency. In addition, the report was reviewed by the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD).

It is EASO's intention to continue to produce such reports on important countries of origin and to update them on a regular basis in order to raise and harmonise COI standards in the EU and to further support the practical implementation of the Common European Asylum System.

The reports can be downloaded via:

EASO, COI report Nigeria, Security situation, November 2018,
https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2018_EASO_COI_Nigeria_SecuritySituation.pdf

EASO, COI report Nigeria, Actors of Protection, November 2018,
https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2018_EASO_COI_Nigeria_ActorsofProtection.pdf

EASO COI report Nigeria, Targeting of individuals, November 2018,
https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2018_EASO_COI_Nigeria_TargetingIndividuals.pdf

EASO, COI report Nigeria, Key-socio-economic indicators, November 2018,
https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2018_EASO_COI_Nigeria_KeySocioEconomic.pdf

[European Commission survey shows citizens worry about interference ahead of the European elections](#)

A new Eurobarometer survey published today sheds light on the expectations of Europeans for the May 2019 European elections and what would motivate them to cast their vote. It also shows that a majority of EU citizens are worried that disinformation campaigns, data breaches and cyberattacks will interfere with electoral processes.

[The 2018 annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights](#) is bringing together politicians, researchers, journalists, NGOs and activists to discuss how to make our democracies more resilient and inclusive, how to support civil society and better safeguard free and fair elections.

Frans **Timmermans**, First Vice-President of the European Commission said: *“Our research shows that people are really worried about disinformation. The good thing is that more and more citizens are critical of the information they are offered, and well aware of the dark forces that would like to manipulate what they read, think and ultimately vote for. For the legitimacy of our European democracy it is essential that citizens use their right to vote. And that’s why we all, EU institutions and Member States, must protect our elections and bolster our democracy.”*

Věra **Jourová**, European Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality added: *“This survey confirms that Europeans know that the upcoming elections will not be business as usual. They expect actions that will*

guarantee fair and secure elections and more information about the EU and new faces in politics. We are fighting against illegal data manipulation, countering disinformation and make our elections more resilient. But we also need the full involvement of EU governments and all political parties. We can only address peoples' concerns if we do this together."

What Europeans want ahead of European elections

42 % of Europeans went to the polls for the 2014 European elections. The figures published today indicate what could bring more Europeans to vote:

- 43 % of the respondents would like to receive more information on the EU and its impact on their daily lives;
- 31 % want more young people standing as candidates.

The Juncker Commission has been working actively on bringing the EU closer to its citizens. The European Commissioners reached out to citizens and participated in over a thousand [Citizens' dialogues](#) since the beginning of the mandate.

The Commission has launched several campaigns, including the [EU Protects](#) campaign and the [EU and Me](#) campaign, which reaches out to younger generations. Ahead of the elections, the European Commission together with the European Parliament will run awareness-raising campaigns to mobilise citizens to vote.

Concerns related to elections

Today's figures show that Europeans are worried about interference in the elections:

- **61%** worry that elections can be manipulated through cyberattacks,
- **59%** worry about foreign actors and criminal groups influencing elections
- **67%** worry that personal data left online could be used to target the political messages they see.

But Europeans overwhelmingly agree (74- 81%) on the way to tackle these threats:

- by introducing more transparency to online social media platforms, including on clearly indicating who is behind online advertisement;
- by giving equal opportunities to all political parties to access online services to compete for voters' attention;
- by giving a right to reply for candidates or political parties on social media;
- by introducing the same silence period online as already exists for traditional media.

Tackling challenges

In September, the European Commission already put forward a [set of concrete measures](#) to make sure that next year's European Parliament elections are organised in a free, fair and secure manner. The measures include greater

transparency in online political advertisements and the possibility to impose sanctions for the illegal use of personal data in order to deliberately influence the outcome of the European elections.

The European Commission also set up a **European electoral cooperation network**, which will meet for the first time in January 2019. The Commission calls on Member States to nominate their representative for this network as soon as possible. The Fundamental Rights Colloquium will look into potential solutions ahead of the network's first meeting.

On disinformation, the European Commission is taking a number of actions. Major tech companies signed the [Code of Practice on Disinformation](#) last month that will help provide more transparency on sponsored political advertising online. The European Commission and the External Action Service (EEAS) are currently finalising a common Action Plan on disinformation for a coordinated response at Union and Member State level to the threat of disinformation. This action Plan is to be adopted in the coming weeks.

Background

The [Eurobarometer survey on Democracy and Elections](#) was conducted 27,474 face-to-face at respondents' home in 28 EU Member States.

The set of measures to [protect European elections](#) focus on:

- **Data protection:** improving the protection of personal data in the electoral context
- **Transparency:** guaranteeing the transparency of online political advertising
- **Cybersecurity:** protecting elections from cyberattacks
- **Cooperation:** improving national and European cooperation on potential threats to European Parliament elections
- **Appropriate sanctions:** guaranteeing that electoral rules are respected by all

For more information

The [Eurobarometer Democracy and Elections – report and factsheets](#)

[State of the Union 2018: Securing free and fair European elections](#)

[Annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights 2018](#)

[Daily News 26 / 11 / 2018](#)

The Juncker Plan supports social enterprises in Spain

The European Investment Bank Group is investing in two equity funds in Spain to support the development of 46 social enterprises in the country. €10 million is invested into Creas Impacto, the first institutional social impact fund in Spain, to support early and late stage social enterprises. €3 million is invested into Equity4Good, managed by Ship2B, a Spanish foundation accelerating social enterprises with high social or environmental impact. Both deals have benefitted from the Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) programme and the latter deal is also backed by the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), the heart of the [Juncker Plan](#). Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne **Thyssen** said: *“These two agreements, one of them supported by the Juncker Plan, will foster the development of social enterprises, which play a crucial role in our economy’s future. I strongly believe that support from public and private partners as well as a committed network of investors is key for start-ups to grow successfully, reach their target markets and fully realize their social mission. The Commission has supported the early stages of both these initiatives through grants under the Employment and Social Innovation programme, which helped them reach investment grade in their respective fields. I congratulate both Fundación Ship2B and Creas Impacto.”* By November 2018, the Investment Plan had already mobilised €360 billion of investment across Europe, including almost €46 billion in Spain, 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; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: + 32 229 67094)

WTO reform: EU proposes way forward on the functioning of the Appellate Body

Today, the EU together with other members of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) – Australia, Canada, China, Iceland, India, New Zealand, Mexico, Norway, Singapore and Switzerland – unveiled a proposal for concrete changes to overcome the current deadlock in the WTO Appellate Body. The proposal will be presented at the meeting of the WTO General Council on 12 December. Commissioner **Malmström** said: *“The appellate body function of the WTO dispute settlement system is moving towards a cliff’s edge. Without this core function of the WTO, the world would lose a system that has ensured stability in global trade for decades. Now, together with a broad coalition of WTO members, we are presenting our most concrete proposals yet for WTO reform. I hope that this will contribute to breaking the current deadlock, and that all WTO members will take responsibility equally, engaging in good faith in the reform process.”* For instance, today’s proposals set clear limits for outgoing Appellate Body members, and aim to make sure that appeal proceedings finish on time. The proposed amendments to the WTO Agreement submitted now to the organisation membership follow up on the [EU’s ideas to modernise the WTO](#), published on 18 September, and are part of a broader effort that includes the recently submitted proposal on notification and transparency rules within the WTO that was co-sponsored among others by US and Japan. They are the result of intense discussions over the past weeks with WTO countries and address in a systematic and constructive manner all of the concerns expressed in recent months with respect to the Appellate Body. For the detailed information about the proposals, see the [press release](#) online. (For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel.: +32 229 56185; Clémence Robin – Tel: +32 229 52509)

L'Union européenne soutient les lauréats du prix Nobel de la Paix 2018, Nadia Murad et Dr Denis Mukwege

Poursuivant son engagement en faveur des femmes victimes de violences sexuelles, l'UE a annoncé aujourd'hui un soutien additionnel d'environ cinq millions d'euros aux projets concrets des deux prix Nobel de la Paix 2018, Nadia Murad et Dr Denis Mukwege. Ce nouveau soutien a été annoncé lors de la rencontre aujourd'hui à Bruxelles de la haute représentante/vice-présidente Federica **Mogherini** et du commissaire en charge de la coopération internationale et du développement, Neven **Mimica**, avec Nadia Murad et Dr Denis Mukwege. Les deux lauréats étaient invités à discuter de l'éradication des violences faites aux femmes et de leurs impacts sur le développement, avec les Ministres européens en charge du développement lors du Conseil des affaires étrangères. La haute représentante/vice-présidente Federica **Mogherini** a déclaré: *"En tant qu'Union européenne, nous saluons non seulement l'immense courage et travail effectué sans relâche par Nadia Murad et Denis Mukwege, souvent au péril de leur vie, mais il est également de notre devoir de soutenir du mieux que nous le pouvons leur travail, pour eux et toutes les personnes qu'ils représentent, comme nous le faisons déjà. C'est aussi la meilleure façon de célébrer la Journée internationale pour l'élimination de la violence faite aux femmes."* Le commissaire Neven **Mimica** a également commenté: *"La violence à l'égard des femmes et des filles constitue l'un des crimes les plus effroyables, l'une des plus grandes injustices de notre temps, ainsi qu'un obstacle au développement de toute société. Je suis très heureux de pouvoir renforcer notre soutien aux lauréats du prix Nobel de la Paix 2018. C'est ainsi que l'Union européenne peut contribuer à mettre fin aux violences sexuelles, une fois pour toutes, partout dans le monde."* Le communiqué de presse complet est disponible [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Maja Kocijancic – Tél.: +32 229 86570; Carlos Martin Ruiz De Gordejuela – Tél.: +32 229 65322; Lauranne Devillé – Tél.: +32 229 80833; Daniel Puglisi – Tél.: +32 229 69140)

Better Regulation: The Commission reviews its efforts to simplify EU legislation

Today, the Commission has published a review of the European Union's efforts to simplify legislation and reduce regulatory burdens in 2018 in line with our commitment in the [Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making](#) and as part of its [Better Regulation Agenda](#). The survey finds that, under the Regulatory fitness and performance (REFIT) programme, the current Commission has delivered more than 150 initiatives focused on simplifying legislation and reducing burdens. A recent example is a proposal to amend the current VAT rules where compliance costs for small businesses are expected to be reduced to €56.1 billion per year, an 18% reduction compared to the present situation. Under another Commission proposal for a single maritime window, savings are estimated at €625-720 million for shipping operators in the period 2020-2030. In 2018, the Commission also presented a set of proposals for the post-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework, which aim to significantly

simplify procedures. Swift adoption by the European Parliament and Council of those proposals that are still pending will allow citizens, businesses and national authorities to benefit concretely from the proposed simplification measures. In carrying out this review, the Commission was supported by the [REFIT Platform](#) which adopted a further 31 opinions in the twelve months to October 2018. The review also presents how the Commission has responded to all 89 Platform opinions. Since 2017, an [online scoreboard](#), updated on a quarterly-basis, tracks in detail the state of play of all REFIT-related activities. The survey is available [online](#). (For more information: *Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456; Kasia Kolanko – Tel.: +32 229 63444*)

Adoption of new rules for veterinary medicinal products and medicated feed

Today, the Council adopted the Regulations on the veterinary medicinal products and medicated feed. The European Parliament had already approved the texts on 25 October 2018 with a very large support. Vytenis **Andriukaitis**, European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, said: *“Today’s endorsement by EU ministers of a new legislation on veterinary medicinal products and medicated feed marks a major step forward in the fight against antimicrobial resistance. It has been a priority since the beginning of my mandate given that, in the EU, the majority of antimicrobials are consumed in animals. I am convinced that the legislation will have a major impact in Europe, but also on a global stage since the EU proves itself as a leader in the battle against antimicrobial resistance.”* The new legislations will help provide for a modern, innovative and fit for purpose legal framework on veterinary medicinal products; give incentives to stimulate innovation; increase the availability of veterinary medicinal products; strengthen the EU action to fight antimicrobial resistance; ensure economically-viable production of safe medicated feed throughout the EU; foster innovation in medicated feed. Following the co-signature by the President of the European Parliament and the Austrian Presidency of the Council the text will be published in the Official Journal of the European Union and enter into force twenty days later. More information is available in the [MEMO](#). (For more information: *Anca Paduraru – Tel.: +32 229 91269; Aikaterini Apostola – Tel.: +32 229 87624*)

Une enquête de la Commission européenne révèle l’inquiétude des citoyens européens face aux risques d’ingérence à quelques mois des élections européennes

La Commission européenne dédie le colloque 2018 sur les droits fondamentaux à la “démocratie dans l’Union européenne”, un thème d’actualité en cette période où les européens s’inquiètent d’ingérence dans les élections. Une nouvelle enquête Eurobaromètre, publiée aujourd’hui, dévoile les attentes des européens quelques mois avant les élections européennes de mai 2019, ainsi les facteurs qui les inciteraient à voter. L’enquête montre également qu’une majorité de citoyens européens s’inquiète du fait que des campagnes de désinformation, des violations de données et des cyberattaques puissent perturber les processus électoraux. Le Colloque annuel 2018 sur les droits fondamentaux rassemble des responsables politiques, des chercheurs, des journalistes, des organisations non gouvernementales et des militants en vue de d’une discussion sur la manière de rendre nos démocraties plus résilientes

et inclusives, de soutenir la société civile et de mieux préserver le caractère libre et équitable des élections. M. Frans **Timmermans**, premier vice-président de la Commission européenne, a déclaré: «*Nos études montrent que la désinformation suscite de vives préoccupations, ce qui a comme aspect positif que de plus en plus de citoyens font preuve d'esprit critique face aux informations qu'ils reçoivent, et sont tout à fait conscients des potentiels éléments perturbateurs qui aspirent à influencer ce qu'ils lisent et pensent, afin de manipuler leur vote. Or il est essentiel que les citoyens exercent leur droit de vote pour que notre démocratie européenne conserve sa légitimité. Et c'est pour cela que nous tous, les institutions de l'UE comme les États membres, devons protéger nos élections et renforcer notre démocratie.*» Et Mme Věra **Jourová**, commissaire européenne chargée de la justice, des consommateurs et de l'égalité des genres, d'ajouter: «*Cette enquête confirme que les Européens savent que les élections à venir ne seront pas comme les autres. Ils attendent des mesures garantissant des élections équitables et sûres. Ils souhaitent aussi obtenir davantage d'informations sur l'UE et voir de nouvelles personnalités politiques s'y présenter. Nous travaillons à lutter contre l'utilisation frauduleuse des données et la désinformation, et à mieux protéger nos élections. Mais les gouvernements des pays de l'UE et tous les partis politiques doivent également pleinement s'investir. Nous ne pouvons répondre aux attentes des citoyens que si nous oeuvrons de concert*». D'après l'Eurobaromètre au sujet des prochaines élections européennes, 43 % des personnes interrogées souhaitent recevoir davantage d'informations sur l'Union européenne et son incidence sur leur quotidien et 31 % souhaitent voir davantage de jeunes candidats aux élections. En septembre, la Commission européenne a déjà présenté un ensemble de mesures concrètes visant à garantir que les élections de l'année prochaine au Parlement européen se déroulent de manière libre, équitable et sûre. La Commission européenne a également mis en place un réseau européen de coopération électorale, qui se réunira pour la première fois en janvier 2019. Le colloque sur les droits fondamentaux commence cet après-midi pour deux jours et est ouvert aux journalistes sur inscription. Toutes les informations sur cet évènement sont disponibles [ici](#). Le communiqué de presse est disponible [en ligne](#), ainsi que l'enquête [Eurobaromètre](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Mélanie Voin – Tel.: +32 229 58659)

Mergers: Commission refers to Belgium the assessment of two interrelated transactions in the media sector

The European Commission has referred to the Belgian Competition Authority the assessment of a proposed merger, consisting of the two following interrelated transactions: (i) the acquisition of sole control over De Vijver Media, of Belgium, by Liberty Global, of the UK; and (ii) the acquisition of joint control over a newly created advertising sales joint venture by Liberty Global and Mediahuis, also of Belgium. De Vijver Media broadcasts the Dutch-language free-to-Air TV channels "Vier", "Vijf" and "Zes", produces TV content and sells advertising space on several TV channels. Liberty Global is the controlling shareholder of Telenet, which operates a cable network in

Flanders and parts of Brussels, and also operates a number of Pay-TV channels. Mediahuis is an independent and diversified Belgian media group that is mainly active in the publishing of Dutch language newspapers and the print, audiovisual and advertising sectors. The newly created joint venture will be active in the marketing and the sale of advertising space linked to digital video and in the sale of cross media advertising. The Belgian authorities asked the Commission to refer the proposed concentration to them. They consider that the transaction may threaten to significantly affect competition in a number of regional markets within Belgium, presenting all the characteristics of distinct markets. These markets relate to all levels of the TV value chain, such as the wholesale supply of TV channels in Telenet's footprint or the retail provision of TV services to end users in Telenet's footprint, and to the sale of advertising space. The evidence gathered by the Commission confirmed that the conditions for a referral under Article 9 of the EU Merger Regulation were fulfilled and that the Belgian Competition Authority is well placed to assess the proposed merger. The Commission has therefore decided to refer the case in its entirety to Belgium, which will deal with the case under national law. More information is available on the Commission's [competition website](#), in the public [case register](#) under the case number [M.8944](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

State aid: Commission approves aid-free privatisation of German HSH Nordbank

The European Commission has approved the sale of HSH Nordbank by the German Länder of Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein to a consortium of private equity funds led by J.C. Flowers and Cerberus. Under the [May 2016](#) Commission decision, German authorities committed to sell HSH's operational part within an agreed deadline in an open, transparent and non-discriminatory tender process, at a positive price and without additional State aid, to a buyer that returns HSH to viability. Germany was required to notify the outcome of the sale process to the Commission. Today's decision confirms that the sale of HSH to a consortium of private equity funds complies with the requirements set out in the 2016 Commission decision. Concretely, the Commission found that: (i) there is no aid to the buyers since HSH is being sold to the bidders with the highest and most credible offer, in an open and transparent process that resulted in a positive price; and (ii) under its new ownership's business plan, HSH is expected to return to viability. In particular, the successful completion of the privatisation will allow HSH to continue to perform its core activities in the market as a restructured and viable entity, without further need of public support. Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition, said: *"The German authorities have found a sustainable solution for HSH Nordbank that avoids the need for further public support for the bank. On the basis of the new private owner's business plan, HSH can become a viable market player, continuing to support economic development in Germany."* The full press release is available online in [EN](#), [DE](#), [FR](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Giulia Astuti – Tel.: +32 229 55344)

Mergers: Commission clears the acquisition of joint control over Network Rail's commercial estate business by Blackstone and Telereal Trillium

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of joint control over the commercial estate business of Network Rail Infrastructure Limited of the UK by Blackstone Group L.P. ("Blackstone") of the US and Tele-Finance Holdings Limited ("Telereal Trillium") of the UK. Network Rail is a public sector body that manages Britain's railway infrastructure in England, Wales and Scotland. Blackstone is a global asset manager. Telereal Trillium is a property management company operating in property partnerships, investment, development and strategic land. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns given the limited overlaps between the companies' activities and the absence of any vertical relationships brought about by the transaction. 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.9131](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Commissioner Thyssen delivers a speech on the European Pillar of Social Rights at the Committee of the Regions

This afternoon, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne **Thyssen**, will deliver a speech at a conference of the [Committee of the Regions on "Delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights: a territorial perspective"](#), in Brussels. The conference will be attended by representatives of the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission, as well as members and rapporteurs of the Committee of the Regions. Other participants will include representatives of Permanent Representations and regional offices in Brussels as well as territorial associations. The aim of this inter-institutional conference is to advance the discussion on the EU's future social, employment and educational policies in the context of the Pillar of Social Rights, taking into consideration the regions' and the cities' role to implement the Pillar. The conference can be followed via [webstreaming](#). (For more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: + 32 229 67094)

Commissioner Vella speaks at the first international high-level Sustainable Blue Economy Conference

Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Karmenu **Vella** will today deliver a speech at the Leaders' Segment of the first international high-level [Sustainable Blue Economy Conference](#) held in Nairobi (Kenya) from 26-28 November. The Commissioner will remind the participants of the recently proposed by President **Juncker Alliance for Sustainable Investment and Jobs between Europe and Africa**, an Alliance that could help

create up to 10 million jobs in Africa in the next 5 years. In support of this Alliance the Commissioner will announce a number of actions through which the EU is supporting the development of a sustainable maritime economy in Africa and beyond. The blue economy has a huge potential to drive sustainable growth. In the European Union – from the Mediterranean through the Atlantic to the Baltic Sea – it generates 566 billion EUR and creates jobs for nearly 3.5 million people. Commissioner **Vella** will also recall the work done by the EU and this Commission in particular in managing fish stocks at sustainable levels by 2020, reducing plastic marine litter, fighting illegal fishing and mobilising the markets through the EU's External Investment Plan. Nearly 44 billion EUR of investment could be activated this way by 2020, including for the maritime economy. As part of his visit to Kenya, Commissioner **Vella** will also meet the President of Kenya, Mr Uhuru Kenyatta to discuss EU-Kenya cooperation in promoting green and blue growth. Tomorrow, Commissioner **Vella** will receive a Medal from the French Maritime Cluster for his commitment and work on actively including the seas and oceans as part of our economy. *(For more information: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: + 32 229 56172; Daniela Stoycheva – Tel.: +32 229 53664)*

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