

Daily News 05 / 11 / 2018

EU supports Italy following deadly floods

The Commission's [24/7 Emergency Response Coordination Centre](#) has been in constant contact with the Italian authorities to offer EU support as heavy floods have affected many parts of the country. The EU's [Copernicus](#) satellite mapping service has been activated, at the request of the national authorities, for the affected areas in Sicily and Veneto. Today in Brussels, Commissioner **Stylianides** is meeting with Mr Agostino Miozzo, Director of the Office promotion and integration of the national service of the Italian Civil Protection Department to discuss the current emergency in Italy. *"We stand in solidarity with the Italian people and authorities at this difficult time. Our thoughts are with the victims and all those affected by the deadly floods as well as with the first responders working tirelessly on the ground. The EU has mobilised its satellite mapping service to help the national authorities. We are ready to provide more support if requested"*, said Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management **Stylianides**. [Photos](#) of the Emergency Centre are available, as well as a video of the EU's [Copernicus](#) programme and a [factsheet](#) on the EU's emergency centre. (For more information: Carlos Martin Ruiz de Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Daniel Puglisi – Tel.: +32 229 69140)

WiFi4EU: As of 7 November municipalities in the EU can apply for free Wi-Fi hotspots in public spaces

On 7 November 2018 at 13:00 (CET), the Commission will launch a call for applications for the scheme 'WiFi4EU'. The call, which is open to municipalities or groups of municipalities in the EU, will be open until 17:00 (CET) on 9 November 2018. €120 million will be available for up to 8,000 municipalities across the EU by 2020. In order to process very large numbers of applications across Europe, the application procedure is simple and fully online. Once they have registered in the dedicated [WiFi4EU portal](#), municipalities will be able to apply online for the €15,000 [WiFi4EU scheme](#) voucher with just one click. So far over one in five municipalities all over Europe has registered their details. Municipalities that have not registered and wish to apply for a voucher, can still register on the portal until the start of the call on 7 November. With the voucher, the municipality will be able to set up a Wi-Fi hotspot in public spaces, including town halls, public libraries, museums, public parks or squares. The Commission is selecting projects on a "first-come, first-served" basis. In the upcoming call, the first 2,800 municipalities will get a WiFi4EU voucher, with each EU Member State being guaranteed to receive at least 15 vouchers. **In the coming two years**, three more WiFi4EU calls will be launched, approximately one every 6 months. WiFi4EU-funded networks will be free of charge, free of advertising and free of personal data harvesting. Funding will be provided for networks that do not duplicate existing free private or public offers of a similar quality. More information is available [online](#) in the [factsheet](#) and [video](#). (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: + 32 229 67083)

TRADE: Commission reports on latest negotiating rounds with Indonesia and New Zealand

The Commission today published two reports summarising the progress made during the latest negotiating rounds for the EU-[Indonesia](#) and EU-New [Zealand](#) trade agreements. Both sets of talks were held in a constructive atmosphere. The sixth round of negotiations for an EU-Indonesia free trade agreement took place from 15 to 19 October in Palembang, Indonesia. Negotiators made good progress across the board, particularly on the chapters on customs and trade facilitation, rules related to trade in food, animal and plant products, technical barriers to trade, as well as questions related to sustainable development. The next round is planned for 11 to 15 March in Brussels. The second round of negotiations for an EU-New Zealand free trade agreement took place in Wellington, New Zealand from 8 to 12 October. The discussions allowed for gaps to be bridged between both sides' positions in a number of areas. They also allowed for follow up actions to be clearly identified, which each side has to complete ahead of the third negotiating round, scheduled to take place in Brussels in February. The reports published today provide an overview of the state of discussions in each area. *(For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel.: +32 229 56185; Kinga Malinowska – Tel: +32 229 51383)*

Eurogroup and ECOFIN meetings, 5 and 6 November 2018

Vice-President **Dombrovskis** and Commissioner **Moscovici** will represent the Commission at today's Eurogroup meeting. The Eurogroup meeting will discuss the ongoing assessment of euro area Member States' draft budgetary plans for 2019, including the Opinion issued by the Commission on Italy's draft budgetary plan. The Eurogroup will be presented with an account of the recent activities of the ECB Supervisory Board and the Single Resolution Board by the Chair of the European Central Bank's Supervisory Board, Danièle Nouy, and the Chair of the Single Resolution Board, Elke König. 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). This will include a discussion on establishing a common backstop for the Single Resolution Fund, roadmap for beginning political discussions on the European Deposit Insurance Scheme (EDIS) and how to enhance the effectiveness of the precautionary tools of the European Stability Mechanism. Commissioner **Moscovici** will participate in the press conference following the meeting. At tomorrow's ECOFIN meeting, the Commission will be represented by Vice-President **Dombrovskis** and Commissioner **Moscovici**. Ministers will exchange views and discuss progress achieved in the negotiations of the digital services tax proposed by the Commission to make corporate tax rules fit for the digital age. The Court of Auditors will present its annual report on management of the EU budget. The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on the EU statistics and climate finance for the COP24. A press conference with Vice-President **Dombrovskis** will follow the meeting. *(For more information: Christian Spahr – Tel.: +32 229 50055; Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Letizia Lupini – Tel.: +32 229 51958; Enda McNamara – Tel.: +32 229 64976)*

TRADE: Commissioner Malmström consults with civil society at advisory group meeting

This afternoon Commissioner for Trade Cecilia **Malmström** will participate in the fifth meeting of the Expert Group on EU Trade Agreements. Commissioner Malmström will discuss the state of EU trade and the challenges ahead with trade policy specialists from 28 organisations representing various industrial sectors, including SMEs, trade unions, consumers, and environmental groups. The group was set up in September 2017 to step up Commission's engagement on trade policy making with the full range of stakeholders and civil society representatives. Since its creation, the group has provided valuable input on a range of issues, including consumer issues, ongoing negotiations, the EU's proposals for modernisation of the WTO, as well as the implementation of the EU-Canada trade agreement. More details about the meeting are available [online](#). The report of the meeting will be published in the following days. *(For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel.: +32 229 56185; Kinga Malinowska – Tel: +32 229 51383)*

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Crayon by OEP

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of Crayon Group Holding ASA ("Crayon") of Norway by One Equity Partners of the US. Crayon is active in software licensing and IT consulting services. One Equity Partners is a private equity funds management company. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, because of the absence of significant horizontal overlaps or vertical links between the companies. 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.9112](#). *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Giulia Astuti – Tel.: +32 229 55344)*

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Radisson by Jin Jiang

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of Radisson Holdings of the US and Radisson Hospitality of Sweden (together "Radisson") by Jin Jiang International Holdings ("Jin Jiang") of China. Radisson operates a range of hotel brands. Jin Jiang is a hospitality and travel group that develops and manages hotels in China and the rest of the world. In the European Economic Area (EEA), Jin Jiang is mainly active through Groupe du Louvre hotels. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, because of the brand and geographic complementarity between Jin Jiang and Radisson. 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.9099](#). *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Giulia Astuti – Tel.: +32 229 55344)*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini travels to Montreal for the EU-Canada Joint Ministerial Committee

On 5-6 November, Federica **Mogherini**, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission will co-chair the 2nd EU-Canada Joint Ministerial Committee in Montreal, Canada together with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada, Chrystia Freeland. The Joint Ministerial Committee is an annual meeting set up under the [EU-Canada Strategic Partnership Agreement](#), which has been provisionally applied since April 2017. The EU and Canada, as likeminded partners, will review the state of bilateral relations as well as look at how to increase their cooperation in the year ahead in areas as diverse as promoting effective multilateralism, strengthening security and defence cooperation, and tackling climate change. While in Montreal, High Representative/Vice-President Mogherini will have a meeting with the Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, in order to discuss pressing foreign policy priorities. She will also, along with Foreign Minister Freeland, speak to students at McGill University, delivering an address on “Navigating uncharted waters: the EU and Canada closer than ever”. The two will also attend the “Most Powerful Women International Summit” organised by Fortune, the business journal in Montreal. Coverage of the visit will be provided by [EbS](#). (For more information: Maja Kocijancic – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Adam Kaznowski – Tel: +32 229 89359)

Lisbon Web Summit: Commissioners Věra Jourová, Margrethe Vestager, Carlos Moedas and Julian King, will present the EU’s strong digital leadership

Several Commissioners will participate in this year’s Lisbon Web Summit starting today in the Portuguese capital, where they will highlight the important role of technology for our democracy and our economy, as well as in promoting gender equality in our society. Commissioners Věra **Jourová**, responsible for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality and Carlos **Moedas**, responsible for Research, Science and Innovation will attend tonight’s opening hosted by António Costa, the Portuguese Prime Minister. Tomorrow, the two Commissioners will start the EU’s programme with a Facebook Live launch of the [2019 EU Prize for Women Innovators](#). Commissioner **Moedas** will also announce the winner of the [EU’s iCapital award](#) for the most innovative city in Europe, accept recommendations for social innovation policy by an EU supported project, sign a new project funding agreement with Innofin/COSME support and attend several talks and panel debates. Also on Tuesday, Commissioner **Jourová** will participate in panel debates on technology’s impact on democracy and on gender equality at the workplace. In addition, Commissioner Julian **King**, responsible for the Security Union, will take part in a panel discussion on the risks from online extremism and disinformation. On Wednesday, Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager**, responsible for Competition policy, will deliver a keynote speech on building a fairer digital economy at the Web Summit’s Centre Stage. Commissioners **Jourová** and **Vestager** and **Moedas** will also hold press conferences at the event [broadcasts will be confirmed on [EbS](#)]. The Commission will also set up a dedicated EU stand at the Web Summit under the #InvestEU banner to promote EU funding and investment

opportunities for European and global technology companies. The EU, together with the [European Investment Bank \(EIB\)](#), has already provided significant investment to support the development of new digital technologies, including through the EU Investment Plan and EU's Research and Innovation funding programme Horizon 2020. More information about the EU presence at the Web Summit is also available through this [Facebook page](#) and via the Twitter hashtag #EUatWebsummit. *(For more information: Lucia Caudet – Tel.: +32 229 56182; Mirna Talko – Tel: +32 2 29 87278)*

Le Commissaire Avramopoulos à Paris

Dimitris **Avramopoulos**, le Commissaire européen pour la migration, les affaires intérieures et la citoyenneté, sera à Paris cet après-midi, où il rencontrera le nouveau Ministre de l'intérieur, Christophe Castaner. Ils discuteront des questions relatives à la politique migratoire, la gestion des frontières extérieures de l'UE et la sécurité. *(Pour plus d'informations: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456; Markus Lammert – Tel.: +32 229 80423)*

Commissioner Vella awarded the Ocean Prize for protecting the oceans from overuse and littering

Commissioner Karmenu **Vella**, responsible for Environment, Maritime affairs and Fisheries receives today the German Ocean Award as recognition for his work for protecting and preserving the ocean, and making it part of our economy in a sustainable way. The award comes after the European Commission committed last week another [€300 million for clean, healthy and safe oceans](#) during the [Our Ocean conference in Bali](#). Commissioner **Vella** said: *"This award is not about me. It is about the coordinated response the European Commission has developed to protect and sustainably use our ocean. It is a reflection of our world leading plastics strategy, which will reduce marine litter, of our global efforts for better ocean governance, of our work with governments around the planet to stop illegal fishing, of our promotion of renewable ocean energy, and of our efforts to lead the way at home on sustainable fishing. This is an award for a European wide effort for the promotion of sustainable ocean use"*. Two years ahead of the initial deadline set, 10% of all EU waters have already been designated as Marine Protected Areas, which with effective management, adequate funding and robust enforcement can have both conservation and economic benefits. Over the last 6 years the number of stocks that are fished at sustainable levels has risen from 20 to 54 – out of 76 for which such advice was available from the [International Council on the Exploration of the Seas](#). The Award also follows the overwhelming support of the European Parliament to the Commission's [Single-Use Plastics proposal](#). The German Ocean Award, under the patronage of the Minister-President of Schleswig-Holstein, is awarded to well-known individuals who have shown special commitment to the cause of preserving and protecting the world's oceans. *(For more information: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: + 32 229 56172; Daniela Stoycheva – Tel.: +32 229 53664)*

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

Looted cultural goods: 13 arrests in Bulgaria and Spain

 **Eurojust/Europol joint press release** | [ES](#)

5 November 2018

On 23 October, the national authorities of Bulgaria and Spain, supported from a [coordination centre](#) at Eurojust, arrested 13 people (four in Bulgaria and nine in Spain) and searched 17 properties. More than 30 600 pieces of cultural heritage artefacts, mostly comprising real and counterfeit coins, were seized from an organised crime group (OCG) involved in the looting and illegal trafficking of cultural goods from Bulgarian archaeological sites as well as the online sale of counterfeit goods in Spain. Approximately EUR 180 000 in cash was also seized. The action day was supported by Eurojust and Europol.

The Specialised Prosecution Office of Bulgaria, together with the Investigative Court 1 of Torrent (Valencia), supported by the Provincial Prosecutor's Office in Valencia, coordinated the work of the Spanish Guardia Civil Operational Central Unit and the Bulgarian Investigative Department at the Specialised Prosecution Office, the General Directorate for Combating Organised Crime of Bulgaria, and the General Directorate National Police of Bulgaria, in an action day on 23 October.

As discovered during the investigation, the leaders of the OCG in Spain were living in Valencia; they had links with others in the provinces of Alicante, Murcia, Segovia and Zaragoza, as well as Bulgaria.


Eurojust and Europol were asked to assist in both the Bulgarian and the Spanish proceedings, coordinating judicial and police actions requested from Spain. This cross-border cooperation also led to the arrest of the OCG members residing in Bulgaria. Eurojust held one [coordination meeting](#) to share information, discuss jurisdictional issues and plan the action day to take place within just three weeks.

All of those arrested are accused of membership in a criminal organisation, crimes against protected historical heritage, illegal trafficking of cultural goods, swindling, money laundering, forgery of official documents and alteration in prices in public tenders and auctions.

Seized during the searches were more than 20 000 authentic and forged coins, several vehicles, laptops and other IT equipment, as well as 36 machine dies to produce counterfeit coins, as well as Greek and Roman ceramics and sculptures, helmets, funeral urns, brooches, chandeliers, rings, amulets, arrowheads and spears. In addition, metal detectors were seized, along with other devices used to manufacture coins and other objects and manipulate them

to look antique so that they could to be sold online. Due to the volume of seized items, other objects still need to be evaluated.

During the action day, European Arrest Warrants, European Investigation Orders and freezing orders were exchanged and executed.

 Photos © Guardia Civil

[EIOPA calls for immediate action to ensure service continuity in cross-border insurance](#)

In December 2017, the European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority (EIOPA) issued an [Opinion](#) on service continuity in insurance linked with the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union. In the Opinion, EIOPA urged insurance undertakings to take necessary steps in good time to ensure the continuity of cross-border insurance contracts between the United Kingdom and the European Economic Area without the United Kingdom (EEA30) after the withdrawal of the United Kingdom.

EIOPA is closely monitoring the contingency planning of insurance undertakings, in particular of the undertakings from the United Kingdom and Gibraltar with cross-border business in EEA30 countries. The insurers with the largest cross-border business in the EEA30 countries have taken action and are implementing contingency measures. However, to date, 124 undertakings from the United Kingdom and Gibraltar with cross-border business in EEA30 jurisdictions have no or insufficient contingency plans in place to ensure service continuity in case of a withdrawal without an agreement between the United Kingdom and the European Union.

In case of a withdrawal without an agreement, 9.1 million EEA30 policyholders might face uncertainty and delays in receiving payments. This is significantly down from the total 38 million EEA30 policyholders with a cross-border contract, which shows the extent of action by UK insurers with large cross-border business. The residual cross-border business concerned have insurance liabilities of EUR 7.4bn. The residual business of insurers from the United Kingdom and Gibraltar without sufficient contingency plans represents (in terms of insurance liabilities) only 0.16% of the overall insurance business in the EEA30 countries.

The majority of the business (with insurance liabilities of EUR 5.4bn) relates to a handful of insurers in the United Kingdom. The remaining business has mainly low value and short-tail liabilities. Overall, 75% of the contracts concerned belong to portfolios with average written premiums of less than EUR 100 per year. On average, the remaining duration of liabilities

of 76% of the contracts is less than two years. The majority of the contracts are with non-life insurers. Only 3 % of the potentially affected policyholders have a contract with life insurers.

EIOPA is working with the national competent authorities to address the residual risk.

By law, insurance undertakings have to ensure continuity and regularity in the performance of their activities, including the development of contingency plans. Supervisory authorities have to ensure compliance respectively. To avoid disruptions in service continuity, immediate and reinforced actions from undertakings and supervisory authorities are required. Insufficient contingency planning that may result in consumer detriment is a severe governance failure.

Policyholders of cross-border insurance contracts with undertakings from the United Kingdom and Gibraltar should be informed by their insurer about the relevant contingency measures they are taking and the impact on their contractual relationship and services. If they have further questions, customers may also wish to contact their insurance company. For general information related to the impact of the withdrawal on insurance contracts and services, the policyholders can contact their [national supervisory authority](#) or the supervisory authorities in [United Kingdom](#) or [Gibraltar](#).

Based on the data collected through the monitoring of the contingency planning and in particular due to the nature and scale of the business concerned, EIOPA's assessment is that the service continuity issue does not give rise to financial stability risks. However, EIOPA will continue to closely monitor and assess potential financial stability risks.

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 Photos © Guardia Civil

[EUR 25 billion and 240 projects in 25 years – EIB Group celebrates quarter of a century in the Czech Republic and presents findings of its investment](#)

survey

- Since 1993 the EIB has lent EUR 24bn for 195 projects in the Czech Republic
- Additionally, the European Investment Fund has approved 45 deals amounting to nearly EUR 1bn
- Key findings of the 2018 EIB investment survey: investment back to pre-crisis levels; lack of skilled staff remains a pressing issue; only 6% of Czech firms invest in R&D; the labour market is getting tighter

“Over quarter of a century the EIB Group has definitely made its mark in the Czech Republic”, said the European Investment Bank Vice-President Vazil Hudák, during a visit to Prague. “We have financed important pieces of transport, energy and social infrastructure, supported SMEs and targeted climate change. However, investment levels in the country are still not high enough. Our latest survey indicates that Czech companies would benefit from higher investment in education, skills and innovation to strengthen the country’s competitiveness and create high-quality jobs.”

25 Years of EIB Group operations in the Czech Republic

The EIB Group, comprising the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Investment Fund (EIF), has played an important role in the modernisation of the Czech Republic’s economy since it started operations in the country in 1993, more than ten years prior to EU accession. As in other EU Member States, the EIB has been supporting investment projects designed to reduce regional disparities, strengthen economic competitiveness and improve people’s living standards. The EU bank’s operations in the country have focused in particular on the development of national and trans-European transport networks, and on support for small and medium-sized businesses and projects having a positive impact on climate action.

The first operations during the early 1990s were targeted at modernising the national roads and railway networks, and at supporting works on the Prague metro. The EU bank provided a helping hand after the devastating floods of 1997 and 2002. Currently, the EIB’s lending operations in the country cover all major sectors of the national economy, ranging from basic infrastructure in the fields of transport, communications, energy and the environment, along with social, regional and municipal facilities, to support for small and medium-sized companies via local financial institutions and the development of a knowledge economy.

Other projects were recently approved by the EIB and should be signed in the near future. Among them: the Czech Railway Infrastructure Rehabilitation (EUR 446m), the Brno Water Infrastructure (EUR 27m), an intermediated loan to Ceska Sporitelna for financing SME and mid-cap projects (EUR 200m) and the Industrial and Business Park Vlnena Brno (EUR 33m).

EIBIS – EIB Investment Survey 2018 – Czech Republic

The annual EIB Investment Survey is back: 401 firms in the Czech Republic were interviewed during the summer, as part of a 12,500 firm survey conducted all over Europe to test market sentiment about investment. Czech firms remain optimistic about the investment outlook. **91% of firms invested last year and on balance, Czech firms expect to keep the same level of investment in 2018.**

The main reasons for investing in the next three years are **replacement and capacity expansion**, with the manufacturing sector more prone to invest to develop new products and processes.

Almost all Czech firms consider **the limited availability of staff with the right skills** to be an impediment to investment, with concerns mostly relating to intermediate and low-skill workers.

Labour market regulation, business regulation and energy costs – besides uncertainty – are considered to be impediments to firms' investment by more than 70% of Czech firms.

Innovation is mostly a matter of adoption of innovation. Czech firms invest relatively less than the EU average in intangibles, but manage to have an innovation profile similar to the EU average. The only exception is the higher share of firms adopting innovation, which is a rather typical feature throughout CESEE.