

# EU consumer rules: The European Commission and EU consumer authorities push Airbnb to comply

Commissioner **Jourová**, Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality said: *"More and more consumers book their holiday accommodation online and this sector has brought many new opportunities to holidaymakers. But popularity cannot be an excuse for not complying with EU consumer rules. Consumers must easily understand what for and how much they are expected to pay for the services and have fair rules e.g. on cancellation of the accommodation by the owner. I expect Airbnb to follow up swiftly with the right solutions."*

Airbnb's current pricing presentation and a number of its terms do not comply with the [Unfair Commercial Practices Directive](#), the [Unfair Contract Terms Directive](#), and the [Regulation](#) on the jurisdiction in civil and commercial matters. Therefore the European consumer authorities and the Commission have demanded from Airbnb a number of changes. The company has until the end of August to present their proposals. Once Airbnb proposes solutions to rectify this, the Commission and the EU consumer authorities will review the proposed changes. If they are not considered satisfactory, Airbnb could face an enforcement action.

## **Price transparency and other unfair commercial practices**

The presentation of Airbnb's pricing, as well as the distinction between private and professional hosts currently does not comply with the requirements of EU law, in particular the [Unfair Commercial Practices Directive](#).

Airbnb should:

- modify the way it presents information on pricing from the initial search on their website, in order to ensure that, whenever properties are offered, the consumer is provided with the total price inclusive of all the applicable mandatory charges and fees, such as service and cleaning charges, or, when it is not possible to calculate the final price in advance, clearly inform the consumer that additional fees might apply;
- clearly identify if the offer is made by a private host or a professional, as the consumer protection rules differ.

## **Clarification of terms or removal of illegal terms**

Airbnb's terms of services should be brought into conformity with European consumer law. The [Unfair Contract Terms Directive](#) requires that standard terms and conditions do not create a significant imbalance between the parties' rights and obligations, to the detriment of the consumer. The

Directive also requires that terms are drafted in plain and intelligible language so that consumers are informed in a clear and understandable manner about their rights.

With regards to Airbnb, this means, for example:

- that the company should not mislead consumers by going to a court in a country different from the one in their Member State of residence;
- Airbnb cannot decide unilaterally and without justification which terms may remain in effect in case of termination of a contract;
- Airbnb cannot deprive consumers from their basic legal rights to sue a host in case of personal harm or other damages;
- Airbnb cannot unilaterally change the terms and conditions without clearly informing consumers in advance and without giving them the possibility to cancel the contract;
- Terms of services cannot confer unlimited and discretionary power to Airbnb on the removal of content;
- Termination or suspension of a contract by Airbnb should be explained to consumers, governed by clear rules and it should not deprive the consumer from the right to adequate compensation or the right to appeal;
- Airbnb's policy on refunds, compensation and the collection of damage claims should be clearly defined and should not deprive consumers from their right to activate the available legal remedies.

Finally, Airbnb should provide an easily accessible link to the Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) platform on its website and all the necessary information related to dispute resolution, pursuant to [the ODR Regulation](#).

## **Next steps**

Airbnb has now until the end of August to propose detailed solutions on how to bring its conduct in compliance with EU consumer legislation. The Commission and the consumer authorities will meet, if needed, with Airbnb in September to solve any outstanding concern. If the company's proposals are not considered satisfactory, consumer authorities could decide to resort to enforcement measures.

## **Background**

The EU Consumer Protection Cooperation (CPC) [Regulation](#) links national consumer authorities in a pan-European enforcement network. Based on this framework, a national authority in one EU country can request the assistance of their counterpart in another EU country to stop a cross-border infringement of EU consumer law.

The cooperation can be activated to enforce various bodies of EU consumer legislation, such as for instance the [Unfair Commercial Practices Directive](#), the [Consumer Rights Directive](#) or the [Unfair Contract Terms Directive](#).

The Consumer Protection Cooperation (CPC) Network has carried out a joint assessment (common position) of Airbnb business practices under the coordination of the Norwegian Consumer Authority ([Forbrukertilsynet](#)) in June

2018. This action has been facilitated by the European Commission.

**For more information**

[CPC Network Authorities common position letter](#)

[More information on consumer enforcement actions](#)

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## **State aid: Commission adopts Best Practices Code to streamline and speed up State aid control**

Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said: *“The new Best Practices Code for State aid control will benefit Member States, businesses and stakeholders by increasing the efficiency and speed of State aid control, in particular by ensuring earlier and better cooperation between Member States and the Commission.”*

Over recent years, the Commission has implemented a major reform package, [State Aid Modernisation](#). The reform allows Member States to quickly implement State aid that fosters investment, economic growth and job creation, leaving the Commission to focus its State aid control on cases most likely to distort competition in the Single Market.

These efforts to focus and modernise EU State aid rules and improve the Commission’s working methods are continuing – in the context of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027, the Commission has proposed to simplify co-investment involving both EU funding and Member State investment, through a revision of the EU State aid Enabling Regulation. This complements the State aid modernisation reform, which has already made sure that 97% of State aid can be implemented without any involvement of the Commission.

To make the most of these modernised State aid rules, the Best Practices Code for State aid control gives guidance on how the Commission, Member States and other stakeholders work together in State aid procedures. This covers, for example, how to ensure that complex State aid cases are handled most effectively, how complaints about State aid are followed up, and monitoring of how Member States implement State aid measures in practice.

The Best Practices Code explains how State aid procedures are carried out, and sets out the steps the Commission is taking to increase the speed, transparency and predictability of these procedures. In particular, it includes guidance on:

- how the Commission will be in contact Member States authorities and provide guidance before State aid measures are formally notified;
- how Member States authorities can implement measures which are unlikely to distort competition, without formally notifying the Commission;
- how the Commission and the Member States will work together to facilitate the handling of State aid cases by allowing Member States to indicate the cases that are of high priority for them;
- how the Commission maintains a network of country coordinators for day-to-day contacts with each Member State to provide immediate support in dealing with any issues;
- how the Commission works with Member States, including by agreeing how to process novel, complex or urgent cases, such as TEN-T network projects supporting the construction and upgrade of transport infrastructure.
- how the Commission can obtain relevant information directly from relevant public authorities or companies by using market information tools;
- how the Commission works with Member States on evaluation and monitoring of State aid measures;
- how complaints about State aid are handled by the Commission following changes in the State aid Procedural Regulation.

The Code has been discussed extensively with Member States and stakeholders.

The text of the Best Practices Code for State aid control is available on the Commission's [website](#).

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**May 2018 – Euro area international trade in goods surplus €16.5 bn – €0.2**

## bn surplus for EU28

The first estimate for **euro area** (EA19) exports of goods to the rest of the world in May 2018 was €189.6 billion, a decrease of 0.8% compared with May 2017 (€191.2 bn). Imports from the rest of the world stood at €173.1 bn, a rise of 0.7% compared with May 2017 (€171.9 bn). As a result, the **euro area** recorded a €16.5 bn surplus in trade in goods with the rest of the world in May 2018, compared with +€19.3 bn in May 2017. **Intra-euro area** trade rose to €162.3 bn in May 2018, up by 0.5% compared with May 2017.

[Full text available on EUROSTAT website](#)

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## EU-China Summit: deepening the strategic global partnership

President of the European Commission Jean-Claude **Juncker** and President of the European Council Donald Tusk represented the European Union at the Summit. The People's Republic of China was represented by Premier Li Keqiang. European Commission Vice-President for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness, Jyrki **Katainen**, Trade Commissioner Cecilia **Malmström**, and Transport Commissioner Violeta **Bulc** also attended the Summit. President Tusk and President Juncker also met with the President of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping.

*"I have always been a strong believer in the potential of the EU-China partnership. And in today's world that partnership is more important than ever before. Our cooperation simply makes sense", [said](#) the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude **Juncker**. "Europe is China's largest trading partner and China is our second largest. The trade in goods between us is worth over €1.5 billion every single day. But we also know that we can do so much more. This is why it is so important that today we have made progress on the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment through a first exchange of offers on market access, and towards an agreement on Geographical Indications. That shows that we want to create more opportunities for people in China and in Europe."*

The full remarks of President **Juncker** at the press conference following the Summit are available [online](#).

The [Joint Summit Statement](#) agreed by the European Union and China illustrates the breadth and depth of the EU-China relationship and the positive impact that such a partnership can have, in particular when it comes to addressing global and regional challenges such as climate change, common security threats, the promotion of multilateralism, and the promotion of open and fair

trade. The Summit follows the High-level [Strategic Dialogue](#), co-chaired by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, Federica **Mogherini** and Chinese State Counsellor, Wang Yi, in Brussels on 1 June, and the [High-level Economic and Trade Dialogue](#), co-chaired by Vice-President **Katainen** and Chinese Vice-Premier, Liu He, in Beijing on 25 June.

This 20th Summit demonstrates the many ways in which the European Union and China are concretely strengthening what is already a comprehensive relationship. In addition to the [Joint Statement](#), a number of other concrete deliverables were agreed, including:

### **Working together for a more sustainable planet**

In the [Leaders' statement on climate change and clean energy](#), the European Union and China have committed to step up their cooperation towards low greenhouse gas emission economies and the implementation of the **2015 Paris Agreement** on climate change. In doing so, the EU and China will intensify their political, technical, economic and scientific cooperation on climate change and clean energy.

Welcoming this commitment, President **Juncker** said: *"We have underlined our joint, strong determination to fight climate change and demonstrate global leadership. It shows our commitment to multilateralism and recognises that climate change is a global challenge affecting all countries on earth. There is no time for us to sit back and watch passively. Now is the time for decisive action."*

Vice-President **Katainen** and the Minister of Ecology and Environment, Li Ganjie\*, also signed the [Memorandum of Understanding to Enhance Cooperation on Emissions Trading](#), which acknowledges the significant potential of emissions trading to contribute to a low carbon economy and further enhances the cooperation of the two largest emission trading systems of the world.

Building on the success of the 2017 EU-China Blue Year, the EU and China have also [signed a Partnership Agreement on Oceans](#). Two of the world's largest ocean economies will work together to improve the international governance of the oceans, including by combating illegal fishing and exploring potential business and research opportunities, based on clean technologies, in the maritime economy. The partnership contains clear commitments to protect the marine environment against pollution, including plastic litter; tackle climate change in accordance with the Paris Agreement and implement the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, in particular [Goal 14](#). The signature of this ocean partnership is the first of its kind and opens the door for future partnerships between the EU and other key ocean players.

Vice-President **Katainen** and the Chairman of the National Development and Reform Commission, He Lifeng\*, also signed the [Memorandum of Understanding on Circular Economy Cooperation](#) that will provide a framework for cooperation, including a high-level policy dialogue, to support the transition to a circular economy. Cooperation will cover strategies, legislation, policies and research in areas of mutual interest. It will address management systems

and policy tools such as eco-design, eco-labelling, extended producer responsibility and green supply chains as well as financing of the circular economy. Both sides will exchange best practice in key fields such as industrial parks, chemicals, plastics and waste.

In the context of the EU's [International Urban Cooperation](#) programme, in the margins of the Summit, Commissioner **Crețu** witnessed the signature of a joint declaration between Chinese and European cities: Kunming and Granada (ES); Haikou and Nice (FR); Yantai and Rome (IT); Liuzhou and Barnsley (UK) and Weinan and Reggio Emilia (IT). These partnerships will facilitate exchanges to examine and develop local action plans reflecting the EU's integrated approach to sustainable urban development while addressing social, economic, demographic and environmental challenges.

### **Putting the international rules-based system at the centre of open and fair trade**

*"I am more convinced than ever that, in the era of globalisation and of interdependence, multilateralism must be at the heart of what we do. We expect all our partners to respect international rules and commitments that they have taken, notably within the framework of the World Trade Organisation", said* President Jean-Claude **Juncker** in his keynote speech at the [EU-China Business Roundtable in Beijing](#), which provided an opportunity for EU and Chinese leaders to exchange views with representatives of the business community. *"At the same time, it is true that the existing WTO rules do not allow unfair practices to be dealt with in the most effective way, but instead of throwing the baby out with the bathwater, we must all preserve the multilateral system and improve it from within."* President Juncker's full speech is available [online](#). Commissioner **Malmström** also intervened at the event.

At the Summit, the EU and China confirmed their firm support to the rules-based, transparent, non-discriminatory, open and inclusive multilateral trading system with the WTO as its core and committed to complying with existing WTO rules. They also committed to co-operating on the reform of the WTO to help it meet new challenges, and established a joint working group on WTO reform, chaired at Vice-Ministerial level, to this end.

Good progress was made on the ongoing **Investment Agreement** negotiations, which is a top priority and a key project towards establishing and maintaining an open, predictable, fair and transparent business environment for European and Chinese investors. The EU and China **exchanged market access offers**, moving the negotiations into a new phase, in which work can be accelerated on the offers and other key aspects of the negotiations. The European Investment Fund (EIF), part of the European Investment Bank Group, and China's Silk Road Fund (SRF) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the aim of confirming the first co-investment carried out under the recently established [China-EU Co-Investment Fund](#) ("CECIF") that promotes investment cooperation between the European Union and China and the development of synergies between China's Belt and Road Initiative and the [Investment Plan for Europe](#).



Regarding steel, both sides agreed to strengthen their cooperation in the Global Forum on Steel Excess Capacity and committed, in accordance with the decisions of the 2016 Hangzhou and 2017 Hamburg Summits, as well as with the 2017 Ministerial decisions, to the goal of implementing the agreed political recommendations.

The EU and China also agreed to conclude the negotiations on an Agreement on cooperation on, and protection from imitation for distinctive food and drink products, so-called **Geographical Indications** before the end of October – if possible. An agreement in this area would result in a high level of protection of our respective Geographical Indications, which represent important traditions and rich resources for both the EU and China.

In the area of **food safety**, the EU and China agreed to promote the highest food safety standards, and are ready to take the regionalisation principle into account, and committed to expanding market access for food products.

The EU and China have also signed the [Action Plan Concerning China-EU Customs Cooperation on Intellectual Property Rights \(2018-2020\)](#), with the aim of strengthening customs enforcement to combat counterfeiting and piracy in the trade between the two. The Action Plan will also promote cooperation between customs and other law enforcement agencies and authorities in order to stop production and wind up distribution networks.

The European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and the General Administration of China Customs signed a [Strategic Administrative Cooperation Arrangement and an Action Plan \(2018-2020\)](#) on strengthening the cooperation in combatting customs fraud in particular in the field of transshipment fraud, illicit traffic of waste and undervaluation fraud.

At the third meeting of the EU-China **Connectivity Platform**, held in the margins of the Summit and chaired for the EU by Commissioner Violeta **Bulc**, the two parties reaffirmed their commitment to transport connectivity on the basis of respective policy priorities, sustainability, market rules and international coordination.

The exchanges focused on:

- the policy cooperation based on the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) framework and the Belt and Road initiative, involving relevant third countries between EU and China;
- cooperation on Transport decarbonisation and digitalisation, including in international fora such as the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO)
- cooperation on investment projects based on sustainability criteria, transparency and level-playing field to foster investment in transport between EU and China.

The joint agreed minutes of the Chairs' meeting are available [online](#), along with the [list of European transport projects](#) presented under the EU-China Connectivity Platform.



## A people's partnership

The European Union and China are putting their respective citizens at the heart of the strategic partnership. There were good discussions on **foreign and security cooperation** and the situation in their respective neighbourhoods. At the Summit, EU and Chinese Leaders discussed ways to support a peaceful solution on the Korean Peninsula; their commitment to the continued, full and effective implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – the Iran nuclear deal; joint, coordinated work on the peace process in Afghanistan; and the situation in eastern Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol. They also discussed other foreign and security challenges, such as in the Middle East, Libya, and Africa, as well as their joint commitment to multilateralism and the rules-based international order with the United Nations at its core.

Many successful activities have already been held within the framework of the [2018 China-EU Tourism Year](#), designed to promote lesser-known destinations, improve travel and tourism experiences, and provide opportunities to increase economic cooperation. At the Summit, Leaders committed to further advancing relevant activities, facilitating tourism cooperation and contacts between people.

With the protection and improvement of human rights at the very core of the European Union and its global partnerships, Leaders also addressed issues relating to **human rights**, a week after the EU and China held their latest [Human Rights Dialogue](#).

Both parties confirmed that they will press ahead with the parallel negotiations on the second phase of the EU-China **Mobility and Migration Dialogue** roadmap, namely on an agreement on visa facilitation and an agreement on cooperation in addressing irregular migration.

The EU and China also agreed to launch new dialogues covering drug-related issues and on humanitarian assistance.

\* Names corrected 16:42 16/07/2018

## Further Information

[EU-China Summit website](#)

[EU-China relations factsheet](#)

[Joint Statement following the 20<sup>th</sup> EU-China Summit](#)

[Remarks of President Jean-Claude Juncker at the press conference following the 20<sup>th</sup> EU-China Summit](#)

[Keynote speech of President Jean-Claude Juncker at the EU-China business roundtable](#)

[Delegation of the European Union to China website](#)

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## Daily News 16 / 07 / 2018

### **EU-China Summit: deepening the strategic global partnership**

Today in Beijing, the European Union and China held their 20<sup>th</sup> Summit. President of the European Commission Jean-Claude **Juncker** and President of the European Council Donald Tusk represented the European Union at the Summit, with Commission Vice-President Jyrki **Katainen**, Trade Commissioner Cecilia **Malmström**, and Transport Commissioner Violeta **Bulc** also participating. *"I have always been a strong believer in the potential of the EU-China partnership. And in today's world that partnership is more important than ever before. Our cooperation simply makes sense", [said](#) President Juncker. "Europe is China's largest trading partner and China is our second largest. The trade in goods between us is worth over €1.5 billion every single day. But we also know that we can do so much more. This is why it is so important that today we have made progress on the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment through a first exchange of offers on market access, and towards an agreement on Geographical Indications. That shows that we want to create more opportunities for people in China and in Europe."* In the margins of the Summit, President **Juncker** also participated in the **EU-China Business Roundtable**. *"The EU is promoting multilateralism, stepping up to global challenges and defending our interests in the world. We will continue to defend a rules-based, open and fair trade. L'Europe est ouverte, mais pas offerte. Let's go forward together, promoting peace, growth and security."* The full speech is available [here](#) (in French). The EU and China have agreed a [Joint Summit Statement](#), illustrating the breadth and depth of the relationship and the positive impact that such a partnership can have, in particular when it comes to addressing global and regional challenges such as climate change, common security threats, the promotion of multilateralism, and the promotion of open and fair trade. In addition to the [Joint Statement](#), a number of other **concrete deliverables** were agreed at the Summit, including: [a Leaders' Statement on Climate Change and Clean Energy](#); an exchange of offers on the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment; [a Partnership Agreement on Oceans](#); [a Memorandum of Understanding on Circular Economy Cooperation](#); [a Memorandum of Understanding to Enhance Cooperation on Emissions Trading](#); agreement to conclude before the end of October, if possible, the negotiations on an Agreement on Geographical Indications; [an Action Plan Concerning China-EU Customs Cooperation on Intellectual Property Rights \(2018-2020\)](#); a Memorandum of Understanding between the European Investment Fund and the Silk Road Forum confirming the first co-investment carried out under the recently established [China-EU Co-Investment Fund](#); and a Strategic Administrative Cooperation Arrangement and an Action Plan (2018-2020) between the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and the General Administration of China Customs. The outcomes of the 20<sup>th</sup> EU-China Summit can be found online in a [full press release](#). A factsheet on EU-China relations is available [online](#). (For more information: Margaritis Schinas – Tel.: +32 229 60524; Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 229 91382; Maja Kocijancic – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Adam

**EU consumer rules: The European Commission and EU consumer authorities push Airbnb to comply [updated on 16/7/2018 at 12:12]**

The European Commission and EU consumer authorities are calling on Airbnb to align their terms and conditions with EU consumer rules and be transparent on their presentation of prices. Commissioner **Jourová**, Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality said: *"More and more consumers book their holiday accommodation online and this sector has brought many new opportunities to holidaymakers. But popularity cannot be an excuse for not complying with EU consumer rules. Consumers must easily understand what for and how much they are expected to pay for the services and have fair rules e.g. on cancellation of the accommodation by the owner. I expect Airbnb to follow up swiftly with the right solutions."* Airbnb's current pricing presentation and a number of its terms do not comply with the [Unfair Commercial Practices Directive](#), the [Unfair Contract Terms Directive](#), and the [Regulation](#) on the jurisdiction in civil and commercial matters. Therefore the European consumer authorities and the Commission have demanded from Airbnb a number of changes. The company has until the end of August to present their proposals. Once Airbnb proposes solutions to rectify this, the Commission and the EU consumer authorities will review the proposed changes. If they are not considered satisfactory, Airbnb could face an enforcement action. A [press release](#) and the authorities' [common position](#) are available online. Commissioner Jourová will give a press statement today at 12:00, which can be followed live on [EBS](#). (For more information Christian Wigand– Tel.: +32 229 62253; Melanie Voin – Tel.: +32 229 58659)

**TRADE: Commission unveils new tool to show EU towns and cities exporting to Japan**

Interested in what opportunities the EU's trade deal with Japan might bring to your country or your home town? Today, the European Commission published [EU-Japan trade in your town](#), an interactive map showing towns and cities around Europe that export to Japan. For example, Cork in Ireland ships pharmaceuticals, dairy products and chemicals to Japan, while the town of Páty in Hungary sends pork, self-checkout terminals and manicure products. The tool includes infographics for each EU country, detailing the number of exporting companies, the number of jobs supported by exports to Japan, a list of products exported from each member state, and other import/export statistics. Today's publication follows a similar tool, [CETA in your town](#), which showcases a sample of EU companies exporting to Canada. On Tuesday 17 July, EU leaders and Prime Minister Abe will sign the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement at the EU-Japan summit. The deal will now be considered and voted upon by the European Parliament and the Japanese Diet. If these two parliaments ratify it before the end of this year, the agreement could be in place by early 2019. (For more information: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: + 32 229 56172; Kinga Malinowska – Tel: +32 229 51383)

**State aid: Commission adopts Best Practices Code to streamline and speed up**

## State aid control

The European Commission has adopted a new Best Practices Code for State aid control. Over recent years, the Commission has implemented a major reform package, [State Aid Modernisation](#), which allows Member States to quickly implement State aid that fosters investment, economic growth and job creation, leaving the Commission to focus its State aid control on cases most likely to distort competition in the Single Market. These efforts to focus and modernise EU State aid rules and improve the Commission's working methods are continuing – in the context of the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027, the Commission has proposed to simplify co-investment involving both EU funding and Member State investment, through a revision of the EU State aid Enabling Regulation. To make the most of these modernised State aid rules, the Best Practices Code for State aid control gives guidance on how the Commission, Member States and other stakeholders work together in State aid procedures. This covers, for example, how to ensure that complex State aid cases are handled most effectively and how complaints about State aid are followed up. The Best Practices Code, which has been discussed extensively with Member States and stakeholders, explains how State aid procedures are carried out, and sets out the steps the Commission is taking to increase the speed, transparency and predictability of these procedures. The text of the Best Practices Code for State aid control is available on the Commission's [website](#). Commissioner Margrethe Vestager, in charge of competition policy, said: *"The new Best Practices Code for State aid control will benefit Member States, businesses and stakeholders by increasing the efficiency and speed of State aid control, in particular by ensuring earlier and better cooperation between Member States and the Commission."* A [full press release](#) is available in EN, FR, DE. (Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Giulia Astuti – +32 229 55344)

## Mergers: Commission opens in-depth investigation into Siemens proposed acquisition of Alstom

The European Commission has opened an in-depth investigation to assess the proposed acquisition of Alstom by Siemens, under the EU Merger Regulation. Siemens and Alstom are global leaders in rail transportation. Both companies have a wide product portfolio and compete in tenders for the manufacture and supply of high speed, mainline and urban rolling stock (trains) as well as mainline and urban signalling solutions. Signalling solutions include signalling systems that provide safety controls on mainline and urban rail network. The proposed transaction would combine the two largest suppliers of rolling stock and signalling solutions in the European Economic Area (EEA) not only in terms of size of the combined operations, but also in terms of geographic footprint of their activities. At this stage, the Commission is concerned that the proposed transaction would reduce competition in the markets where the merged entity would be active and, in particular, that the proposed transaction could lead to higher prices, less choice and less innovation due to reduced competitive pressure in rolling stock and signalling tenders. This would be to the detriment of train operators, infrastructure managers and ultimately European passengers who use trains and metros on a daily basis. The Commission will now carry out an in-depth

investigation into the effects of the transaction to determine whether its initial competition concerns are confirmed. Commissioner Margrethe Vestager, in charge of competition policy, said: *"Trains and the signalling equipment that guide them are essential for transport in Europe. The Commission will investigate whether the proposed acquisition of Alstom by Siemens would deprive European rail operators of a choice of suppliers and innovative products, and lead to higher prices, which could ultimately harm the millions of Europeans who use rail transportation every day for work or leisure."* A [full press release](#) is available in EN, FR, DE. (Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel +32 2 299 05 26)

#### **Juncker Plan: €68 million for industrial innovation at Arctic white goods factory in Romania**

The European Investment Bank (EIB) has signed a €68 million loan supported by the Juncker Plan's European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) to white goods producer Arctic, in Romania. The loan will finance the construction of a large-scale washing machine production plant featuring advanced manufacturing technologies, including Internet of Things applications, and the latest automation processes. The new production plant will make Romania a white goods production hub for Europe, stimulating new investments. Commissioner for Regional policy Corina **Crețu** said: *"This project embodies Romanian excellence in terms of innovation and advanced technology. The Investment Plan for Europe is giving Arctic the financial boost it needs to expand beyond local markets and create quality, sustainable jobs in Romania. This is a concrete example of successful industrial modernisation, supported by the EU. I congratulate the EIB and Arctic on this great deal."* (Full press release is found [here](#). For all the latest EFSI results see the [Investment Plan website](#) or contact Christian Spahr – Tel.: +32 229 50055; Siobhán Millbright – Tel.: +32 229 57361)

#### **Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Hogg Robinson Group by GBT**

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of Hogg Robinson Group Plc ('HRG') of the UK by GBT III B.V. ('GBT') of the Netherlands, a full-function joint venture controlled by American Express Company of the US and Qatar Holding LLC of Qatar. Both GBT and HRG are globally active in the provision of business travel agency services. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, because, although GBT and HRG are both large agencies offering a broad range of services to international corporate customers, a number of strong players would continue to constrain the combined entity post-transaction, preventing it from raising its prices or worsening the quality of its services. 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.8862](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Giulia Astuti – Tel.: +32 229 55344)

#### **Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of DESFA by Snam**

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the



acquisition of DESFA of Greece by Snam of Italy. DESFA operates the high-pressure pipeline grid and a liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal in Greece. Snam is the main gas transmission system operator in Italy. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, because the companies are not active in the same geographic area. 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.8953](#). *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Giulia Astuti – Tel.: +32 229 55344)*

#### **Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Mehiläinen Holding by CVC Capital Partners**

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of Mehiläinen Holding AB of Sweden by CVC Capital Partners SICAV-FIS S.A. ("CVC") of Luxembourg. Mehiläinen Holding is the holding company of Mehiläinen Oy, which provides healthcare and social care services in Finland. CVC manages investment funds and platforms. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, because there are no horizontal and limited vertical overlaps between the activities of 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.8975](#). *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Giulia Astuti – Tel.: +32 229 55344)*

#### **Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Partner in Pet Foods by Cinven**

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of Partner in Pet Foods Hungaria Kft of Hungary by funds belonging to the Cinven group of the UK. Partner in Pet Foods manufactures and supplies private label and branded industrial pet food in Europe. Cinven is a private equity firm. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, because Cinven does not control any company that is active in the same markets, or has any vertical or conglomerate link with markets in which Partner in Pet Foods is active. 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.8936](#). *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Giulia Astuti – Tel.: +32 229 55344)*

#### **Concentrations: La Commission autorise l'acquisition de M Group Services par PAI Partners**

La Commission Européenne a approuvé, en vertu du règlement européen sur les concentrations, l'acquisition de M Group Services, basée au Royaume Uni, par PAI Partners SAS, basée en France. M Group Services fournit différents types de services aux secteurs des services d'utilité publique, des télécommunications et des transports, tels que l'installation et la maintenance d'infrastructure de réseaux, des services de données et la

construction, la maintenance et la réparation d'infrastructures routières et ferroviaires. PAI Partners est une société de capital investissement qui gère et conseille des fonds détenant des participations dans des entreprises actives dans des domaines variés tels que les services aux entreprises, les biens de consommation, les biens industriels, la santé et la grande distribution. La Commission a conclu que la concentration envisagée ne soulèverait pas de problème de concurrence, dans la mesure où les entreprises ne sont pas actives sur le même marché ou sur des marchés liés ou complémentaires. La transaction a été examinée dans le cadre de 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.8979](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Giulia Astuti – Tel.: +32 229 55344)

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### **Competitiveness Council: Croatia signs declaration on artificial intelligence, all EU Member States now working on coordinated plan**

Today, in the margins of the [informal Council meeting of Competitiveness ministers](#) in Vienna, Croatia will become the last Member State to sign the [Declaration of Cooperation on Artificial Intelligence](#) (AI), thus strengthening the [European approach](#) presented by the Commission in April 2018. One objective of the Declaration is to create synergies across relevant funding schemes within Europe. The Commission and Member States are now working on a coordinated plan in line with the call by European leaders on 28 June 2018 ([European Council conclusions](#)). Vice-President for the Digital Single Market Andrus **Ansip** and Commissioner for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs Elżbieta **Bieńkowska** participate in today's sessions, focusing on the role of AI in transforming European industry, the importance of digital skills and making the right investments. Commissioner **Moedas** will participate in tomorrow's discussion on the proposal to invest €100 billion over 2021-2027 in research and innovation through the funding programme [Horizon Europe](#). This discussion also builds on the European Council meeting from 28 June, where EU leaders [agreed](#) on further developing high-quality research and its transformation into new products, services and business models. The informal Competitiveness Council follows just weeks after the Commission proposed under the next long-term EU budget to invest €9.2 billion in the first ever digital programme [Digital Europe](#), including €2.5 billion to help companies across Europe to adopt AI. Press conference can be followed on [EbS](#). (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Inga Höglund – Tel.: +32 229 50698; Lucia Caudet – Tel.: +32 229 61 82; Victoria von Hammerstein – Tel.: +32 229 80379)

### **Commissioner Hahn visits Skopje and Tirana**

Johannes **Hahn**, Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations will visit Skopje and Tirana tomorrow 17 July. The visit follows the June Council Conclusions setting out the path towards opening of



accession negotiations in June 2019 with [the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia](#) and with [Albania](#). In this context, Commissioner **Hahn** will officially launch the preparatory work. In Skopje, the Commissioner will meet with key interlocutors including Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, Speaker Talat Xhaferi, representatives of political parties and will address the National Council for European Integration, which also includes civil society, business and other stakeholders. In Tirana Commissioner Hahn will meet with President Ilir Meta, Prime Minister Edi Rama and representatives of the government of Albania. Photos and video of the mission will be available on [EbS](#). *(for more information: Maja Kocijančič – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Alceo Smerilli – Tel.: +32 229 64887)*

### **Commissioner King in Cyprus to discuss security and the fight against terrorism**

Tomorrow Commissioner for the Security Union Julian **King** will be in Nicosia, Cyprus where he will meet the Minister of Justice and Public Order Mr Ionas Nicolaou to discuss security related issues, in particular the fight against terrorism and organised crime as well as cyber security. Commissioner King will also participate in a joint meeting with the Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign and European Affairs Mr Yiorgos Lillikas and the Deputy Chairman of Parliamentary Standing Committee on Legal Affairs Mr Demetris Dimitriou. Later, he will discuss organised crime and information exchange with the Cypriot Chief of Police Mr Zacharias Chrysostomou. Commissioner King will also visit the Cybercrime Centre. A joint press point by Commissioner **King** and Minister Nicolaou will take place at around 12.30 (CET). *(For more information: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456; Tove Ernst – Tel.: +32 229 86764; Katarzyna Kolanko – Tel.: +32 229 63444)*

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