

Statement by Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič on the third political meeting under the European Battery Alliance

Today we held our third political meeting under the European Battery Alliance in less than 18 months.

Respective ministers were very clear about their resolve to prioritise the establishment of a strategic battery value chain in Europe –and therefore to speed up and step up our coordinated support for strategic trans-national projects across the supply chain.

We already have a lot to be proud of. Because cross-border, large-scale integrated consortia are being established in our countries across all segments of the EU value chain:

- Raw materials: Sweden, Finland, Portugal.
- Chemicals: in cooperation between Belgium and Poland as well as between Germany and Finland.
- Battery cells production: Sweden, France, Germany, Italy, the Czech Republic.
- Battery pack, software, machine tools and engineering: the automakers in Germany, France, Spain, Slovakia.
- Recycling: Belgium, Germany.

So the most visible achievement is undoubtedly the undisputable lead taken by our industry across the battery value chain.

According to InnoEnergy, EUR 100 bn have already been announced and are being invested in flagship projects covering the entire supply chain, incl. OEMs/car manufacturers.

Public authorities – namely, the COM, Member States and the EIB – are joining forces to support this venture.

All Member States represented on this stage have for instance, launched calls to express their interest in one or more important projects of common European interest – and I will elaborate in a minute.

I can tell you that our non-European competitors are getting worried. But at the same time, we cannot be naïve, as we are catching up slowly.

So we have agreed to act even faster.

As a result, the Commission expects the first IPCEI to be (pre-)notified to us by the end of this semester. I would want the Commission to be able to reach its decision still under this mandate. Commissioner Vestager today

discussed with the Member States the effort needed and cooperation will now intensify – already on 10 May, here in Brussels, the Commission with Member States and industrial actors will meet at expert level.

More Member States are now showing their interest to join the IPCEI (the important projects of common European interest). I have assured them today that we will look at subsequent projects with the same level of determination and commitment.

Moreover, our strategic partnership with the EIB is reaching an unprecedented level. Soon, in May, a decision will be taken by its Board on substantial financing for a Giga-factory in Sweden – it means moving from a pilot line to industrial deployment. This should serve as reference for other investors and future projects.

By June, our EU accelerator – the EIT InnoEnergy – is setting up together with the EIB support an Investment Platform. This match-making platform should create an additional flow of EUR 70 bn into EU-based projects.

Finally, we all agree that we need a robust framework in place to support our European champions.

This means our sustainability requirements and standards should be ready (i.e. enforceable) when EU mass production starts in 2022-23. And they should cover the entire value chain – so not just the recyclability and re-use, but also sustainable and ethical mining, and a production based on low carbon footprint. This is the only way to underpin our competitiveness and promote our standards globally.

We must also show that we mean business when filling the remaining gaps in the value chain, notably mining and refining. EU companies need to be better supported to invest in sustainable mining and refining of raw materials – both in EU and third countries. We plan to launch a European Raw materials investment facility with the EBRD and the EIB) – hopefully at the end of the year.

Following on our recent exchanges with our Chinese partners (I returned from the Belt and Road Forum yesterday), I am absolutely convinced that we need to ask for reciprocity in the way our companies are treated.

We ultimately want our European champions to be able integrate into global value chains – the same way our foreign competitors are investing in Europe.

For all these reasons, we see that our efforts under the EU Battery Alliance – to build a strategic value chain for batteries in Europe – should and can serve as a pilot for our future industrial policy. The European Council has requested its long-term vision for the end of this year.

Jeunes agriculteurs: 1 milliard d'euros pour faciliter l'accès au financement

La Commission européenne et la Banque européenne d'investissement (BEI) ont lancé aujourd'hui un programme de prêts d'un milliard d'euros ciblant plus particulièrement les jeunes agriculteurs. En 2017, 27% des demandes de prêt adressées aux banques par des jeunes agriculteurs de l'UE ont été rejetées, contre 9% seulement pour les autres exploitations. Le programme de prêts d'un milliard d'euros annoncé aujourd'hui par le commissaire à l'agriculture, Phil **Hogan**, et le vice-président de la BEI, Andrew McDowell, vise à accroître l'accès au financement des agriculteurs de l'Union européenne, en particulier des jeunes agriculteurs. La commissaire **Hogan** a déclaré: « *L'accès au financement est crucial et constitue trop souvent un obstacle pour les jeunes qui souhaitent rejoindre la profession. Seulement 11% des agriculteurs européens ont moins de 40 ans. Soutenir les jeunes agriculteurs est une priorité pour la Commission européenne et nos propositions pour la Politique Agricole Commune d'après 2020 reflètent cette volonté. Je suis ravi de voir cette nouvelle initiative conjointe devenir opérationnelle.* » Le programme sera géré au niveau des États membres par des banques et des sociétés de crédit-bail opérant dans l'ensemble de l'UE. Les banques participantes devraient également contribuer à la hauteur du montant engagé par la BEI, ce qui porterait le montant total à deux milliards d'euros, et la priorité pour ces prêts devrait être accordée aux jeunes agriculteurs. Les prêts du programme auront entre autres des taux d'intérêt plus bas et une plus longue période de remboursement afin de remédier aux difficultés actuelles auxquelles les agriculteurs sont confrontés lorsqu'ils ont besoin d'un prêt. Un communiqué de presse est disponible [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Daniel Rosario – Tél.: + 32 229 56185; Clémence Robin – Tél.: +32 229 52509)

Juncker Plan supports launch of Nordic deep-tech fund Voima Ventures

The Investment Plan for Europe – [the Juncker Plan](#) – is backing the first venture capital (VC) fund in the Nordics investing purely in startups in deep tech and science: Voima Ventures. Deep tech startups are at the forefront of science-driven innovation and aim to address the biggest challenges humanity faces in areas such as medicine, transport and energy. Cornerstone investors to the new fund are the European Investment Fund (EIF) – backed by European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), the heart of the Juncker Plan – and VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland, backed by Finnish private and institutional investors. The EIF will provide up to €20 million to the fund. Vice-President Jyrki **Katainen**, responsible for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness said: “*The startups that Voima Ventures will invest in are making scientific breakthroughs and high-tech innovations that could change our lives. For such novel projects based in deep tech and science, financial support is crucial and this is where the EU is playing an important role. I wish Voima and its beneficiaries much success and I look forward to hearing about their future innovations.*” A press release is available [here](#). As of April 2019, the Juncker Plan has mobilised almost €393 billion of additional investment, including €8.2 billion in Finland. The Plan is currently

supporting 945,000 small and medium businesses across Europe. (For more information: Annika Breidthardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153; Siobhan Millbright – Tel.: +32 229 57361)

Semaine européenne de la jeunesse 2019: “La démocratie et moi”

La Semaine européenne de la jeunesse a lieu tous les deux ans. Elle célèbre et encourage les activités destinées aux jeunes par le biais d'événements organisés dans tous les pays participant au programme Erasmus+. Du 29 avril au 5 mai, la neuvième édition de la Semaine européenne de la jeunesse se déroule dans toute l'Europe, dont le thème de cette année est « La démocratie et moi ». Parallèlement aux activités qui se déroulent toute la semaine dans tous les pays participants, des événements phares à Bruxelles rassembleront des centaines de jeunes les 29 et 30 avril pour faire entendre leur voix. Dans la perspective des prochaines élections au Parlement européen du 23 au 26 mai, les débats de la Semaine européenne de la jeunesse de cette année porteront sur la manière dont les jeunes peuvent être actifs dans leurs communautés et influencer les décisions démocratiques. Tibor **Navracsics**, commissaire en charge de l'éducation, de la culture, de la jeunesse, des sports, a déclaré: « Je salue cette génération de jeunes Européens actifs, engagés et prêts à venir en aide aux autres. Près de 125 000 jeunes sont aujourd'hui inscrits au corps européen de solidarité, ce qui témoigne clairement de la volonté de la jeunesse à être actrice de la société. Notre dernière enquête Eurobaromètre sur les jeunes révèle que trois jeunes sur quatre déclarent avoir pratiqué l'une ou l'autre forme d'activité civique, qu'il s'agisse de voter, d'adhérer à un mouvement, de signer une pétition en ligne ou de s'engager dans le volontariat. J'en suis fier et j'encourage les jeunes à mobiliser leurs pairs pour qu'ils votent lors des prochaines élections du Parlement européen et s'expriment ainsi sur la construction de leur avenir. » Aujourd'hui, la Commission européenne a également publié les résultats de l'Eurobaromètre sur l'opinion des jeunes quant à la manière de construire une Europe plus forte et plus unie. En outre, cet après-midi, le commissaire **Navracsics** présentera les résultats des [Altiero Spinelli Awards 2018](#). Le 30 avril, le Commissaire organisera un dialogue citoyen avec les jeunes, ainsi qu'un débat au Parlement européen à Bruxelles, rassemblant plus de 800 jeunes qui débattront de la participation démocratique et de l'impact du corps européen de solidarité sur les jeunes, les ONG et les communautés locales. Plus d'informations sont disponibles dans le [communiqué de presse](#). Le programme complet de la Semaine européenne de la jeunesse est disponible [ici](#). Les dernières statistiques sur le corps européen de solidarité sont disponibles [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tél .: +32 229 67083; Sara Soumillion – Tél .: + 32 229 67094)

EU releases €1.5 million in immediate assistance after cyclone Kenneth hits Mozambique and Comoros

Following the extensive damage caused by tropical cyclone Kenneth in northern Mozambique and Comoros, the EU is providing initial €1.5 million to help the people affected by the heavy rainfall and destruction that the new cyclone left in its trail. Christos **Stylianides**, Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid

and Crisis Management said: *“Mozambique is facing a double disaster as a second devastating cyclone hits the country in just over a month. The EU is acting fast to deliver essential supplies, especially given that Mozambique is still recovering from cyclone Idai. We express our solidarity with the people of Mozambique and of Comoros. Our thoughts are with the national first responders working at this difficult time”*. The new EU funding will provide food aid, emergency shelter, water and sanitation, basic essential items, and emergency telecommunications support for those most in need, following the heavy rainfall and strong winds, causing people to be evacuated from their homes, damage to infrastructure, loss of crops, and an increased risk of flash floods. The full press release is available [here](#). (For more information: Carlos Martin Ruiz De Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Daniel Puglisi – Tel.: +32 229 69140)

Strengthening the Commission’s oversight in a modern and robust anti-fraud system

The European Commission has today adopted its new Anti-Fraud Strategy that seeks to further improve the detection, sanctioning and prevention of fraud and will support the Commission’s ongoing efforts to bring fraud against the EU budget further down. The vision behind the new Strategy is to strengthen the corporate oversight of the Commission regarding all issues related to fraud and to reinforce the anti-fraud system that is already in place. Günther H. **Oettinger**, Commissioner for Budget and Human Resources, said: *“The European Commission has zero tolerance to fraud. Every euro from the EU budget should be well spent and should create added value for the EU citizens. Today’s Strategy will help us stay focused on preventing, detecting and stopping fraud. We must always remain one step ahead of fraudsters.”* More information is available in the press release [here](#). (For more information: Alexander Winterstein: Tel.: +32 229 93265; Andreana Stankova – Tel.: +32 229 57857)

Antitrust: Commission accepts commitments by Mastercard and Visa to cut inter-regional interchange fees

The European Commission has made commitments offered by Mastercard and Visa legally binding under EU antitrust rules. The companies will significantly reduce (on average by around 40%) their multilateral interchange fees for payments in the European Economic Area (EEA) with consumer cards issued elsewhere. The Commission outlined its competition concerns related to inter-regional MIFs in a [Statement of Objections addressed to Mastercard](#) on 9 July 2015 and a [Supplementary Statement of Objections addressed to Visa](#) on 3 August 2017. In particular, the Commission was concerned that inter-regional interchange fees (also referred to as “inter-regional MIFs”) may anti-competitively increase prices for European retailers accepting payments from cards issued outside the European Economic Area (EEA) and in turn lead to higher prices for consumer goods and services in the EEA. Mastercard and Visa, each separately, offered commitments that would reduce the inter-

regional MIFs by an average of 40%. The commitments, which will apply for five years and six months, cover inter-regional interchange fees applied to payments made with the Mastercard, Maestro, Visa, Visa Electron and V-PAY credit and debit card brands. In [December 2018](#), the Commission consulted market participants to verify the appropriateness of the proposed commitments. In light of the Commission's analysis and the results of the market test, the Commission is satisfied that the commitments offered by Mastercard and Visa address its concerns. The Commission is the first competition authority in the world to intervene on inter-regional MIFs. Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said: *"Mastercard and Visa have committed to significantly reduce the interchange fees applied to payments made in Europe with cards issued elsewhere. The commitments, which are now binding on Visa and Mastercard, will reduce the costs borne by retailers for accepting payments with cards issued outside the EEA. This, together with our January 2019 decision on Mastercard's cross-border card payment services, will lead to lower prices for European retailers to do business, ultimately to the benefit of all consumers"*. More information, including the full version of the commitments, is available on the Commission's [competition website](#), in the [public case register](#) under the case numbers [AT 39398](#) (Visa) and [AT 40049](#) (Mastercard). The full press release is available online in [EN](#), [FR](#), [DE](#). (For more information: Lucía Caudet – Tel. +32 229 56182; Giulia Astuti – Tel.: +32 229 55344)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of control over Pondus by Swiss Life and Montagu

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of control over Pondus GmbH & Co. KG ("Pondus") of Germany by Swiss Life Holding AG ("Swiss Life") of Switzerland and Montagu Private Equity LLP ("Montagu") of the UK. Pondus is a real estate company that leases out a retail and office building in Berlin, Germany. Swiss Life is an insurance company. Montagu is a private equity firm. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns as it would have a limited impact on the structure of the markets for real estate rental services and management. 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.9344](#). (For more information: Lucía Caudet – Tel. +32 229 56182; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Gdansk Port Holdings by PFR, IFM Investors and PSA

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of Gdansk Port Holdings S.à.r.l. ("GPHS") of Luxembourg by Polski Fundusz Rozwoju S.A. ("PFR") of Poland, IFM Investors Pty Ltd ("IFM Investors") of Australia and PSA Baltics NV of Belgium. GPHS is the holding company of DCT Gdańsk S.A. (Poland), which operates two deep-sea container quays located in the Port of Gdansk, Poland. PFR is the parent company of a group of financial and advisory institutions supporting companies, local governments and individuals investing in the sustainable social and economic development of Poland. IFM Investors is a global investment manager of

infrastructure, listed equities, private capital and debt investments. PSA Baltics is a wholly owned indirect subsidiary of PSA International Pte Ltd (Singapore), a global operator of shipping terminals. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would not raise competition concerns because of the limited impact it would have on the market. The transaction was examined under the simplified merger review procedure. More information is available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the public [case register](#) under the case number [M.9310](#). (For more information: Lucía Caudet – Tel. +32 229 56182; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of joint control of DirectRoute (Fermoy) by 3i, TIIC Management and Aberdeen Infrastructure

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of joint control over DirectRoute (Fermoy) Holdings Limited (“Fermoy HoldCo”) of Ireland by 3i Group plc (“3i”) of the UK, TIIC Management S.à.r.l. of Luxembourg and Aberdeen Infrastructure Partners LP Inc (“AIPLP”) of Guernsey. Fermoy HoldCo is the parent company of DirectRoute (Fermoy) Limited, which operates the M8 Rathcormac/Fermoy Bypass in Ireland pursuant to a concession contract awarded in 2004 for 30 years. 3i is an international investment company with two complementary businesses, Private Equity and Infrastructure, specialising in core investment markets in northern Europe and North America. TIIC Management is a pan-European infrastructure firm investing into mid-market infrastructure projects across Europe in both the transportation and social sectors. AIPLP is an investment portfolio consisting of Private Finance Initiative and Public Private Partnerships (PPP) assets. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns because there is no horizontal overlap or vertical link between the activities of the companies in the European Economic Area. The operation was examined under the simplified merger review procedure. More information will be available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the [public case register](#) under the case number [M.9271](#). (For more information: Lucía Caudet – Tel. +32 229 56182; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of joint control of DirectRoute (Limerick) by 3i, TIIC Management and Meridiam

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of joint control over DirectRoute (Limerick) Holdings Limited (“Limerick HoldCo”) of Ireland by 3i Group plc (“3i”) of the UK, TIIC Management S.à.r.l. and Meridiam Infrastructure Finance S.à.r.l. (“Meridiam”), both of Luxembourg. Limerick HoldCo is the parent company of DirectRoute (Limerick) Limited, which operates the M7 Limerick Southern Ring Road in Ireland pursuant to a concession contract awarded in 2006 for 35 years. 3i is an international investment company with two complementary businesses, Private Equity and Infrastructure, specialising in core investment markets in northern Europe and North America. TIIC Management is a pan-European infrastructure firm investing into mid-market infrastructure projects across Europe in both the transportation and social sectors.

Meridiam is an international investment company, which develops, finances and manages infrastructure projects. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns because there is no horizontal overlap or vertical link between the activities of the companies in the European Economic Area. The operation was examined under the simplified merger review procedure. More information will be available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the [public case register](#) under the case number [M.9272](#). (For more information: Lucía Caudet – Tel. +32 229 56182; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Mergers: Commission clears creation of joint venture by Aberdeen and Investcorp

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of joint control over a newly created joint venture by Aberdeen Asset Management plc (“Aberdeen”) of the UK and Investcorp Investment Holdings Limited (“Investcorp”) of the Cayman Islands. The joint venture will provide investment advisory services to investment funds with respect to social and economic infrastructure projects in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Middle East and North Africa region and Turkey. Aberdeen and Investcorp are investment companies with a broad range of investments in different industries. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, given that the joint venture will only be active outside of the European Economic Area. 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.9346](#). (For more information: Lucía Caudet – Tel. +32 229 56182; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Eurostat: Le taux de chômage régional, compris entre 1,3 % et 35,1%, a baissé dans 8 régions de l'UE sur 10

Plus de 80% des 281 régions NUTS 2 (régions de base pour l'application des politiques régionales) que compte l'Union européenne ont vu leur taux de chômage des personnes âgées de 15 à 74 ans diminuer en 2018 par rapport à 2017. Environ 60% ont enregistré un recul d'au moins 0,5 point de pourcentage. Toutefois, les taux de chômage régionaux sont toujours marqués par de fortes disparités entre régions de l'UE. Les taux les plus faibles ont été enregistrés dans les deux régions de Prague (1,3%) et du Sud-Ouest (1,5%) en Tchéquie et en Moyenne-Franconie (1,8%) en Allemagne, suivies par les deux autres régions allemandes de Tübingen et du Haut-Palatinate ainsi que par la région de Cumbrie au Royaume-Uni (1,9% chacune). À l'autre extrémité de l'échelle, les taux de chômage les plus élevés ont été relevés à Mayotte (35,1%), une région ultrapériphérique française, à Ceuta (29,0%), une ville autonome espagnole, dans la région de Macédoine occidentale (27,0%) en Grèce, à Melilla (25,8%), une autre ville autonome espagnole, à La Réunion (24,3%), une autre région ultrapériphérique française et dans la région de la Grèce occidentale (24,1%). Ces données sur le chômage régional, établies sur la base de l'enquête communautaire sur les forces de travail, sont publiées par Eurostat, l'office statistique de l'Union européenne. Un communiqué de presse est disponible [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Christian Wigand – Tél.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tél.: + 32 229 67094)

Eurostat: Le revenu réel des ménages par habitant en hausse dans la zone euro et dans l'UE28, la consommation réelle par habitant stable dans la zone euro et en hausse dans l'UE28 (quatrième trimestre 2018)

Dans la zone euro, en termes réels, le revenu des ménages par habitant a augmenté de 0,3% au quatrième trimestre 2018, après une hausse de 0,2% au trimestre précédent. La consommation réelle des ménages par habitant est restée stable au quatrième trimestre 2018, tout comme au troisième trimestre 2018. Dans l'UE28, le revenu réel des ménages par habitant a augmenté de 0,3% au quatrième trimestre 2018, après une hausse de 0,6% au trimestre précédent. La consommation réelle des ménages par habitant a progressé de 0,2% au quatrième trimestre 2018, après une hausse de 0,3% au troisième trimestre 2018. Un communiqué de presse Eurostat est disponible [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Christian Wigand – Tél.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tél.: + 32 229 67094)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

High Representative/Vice-President Mogherini in Berlin for a Western Balkans meeting

High Representative/Vice-President Federica **Mogherini** is in Berlin today for a meeting with the Western Balkans' leaders as well as Slovenia and Croatia, organised by German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron. The meeting taking place this afternoon will offer an opportunity to highlight the ongoing efforts for reconciliation, good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation, to further foster stability and prosperity across Europe. The Prespa agreement set a historic example of reconciliation, while through the ongoing EU-facilitated dialogue Belgrade and Pristina seek lasting solutions to the benefit of their people, the region and beyond. In the margins of the Western Balkans meeting, Federica **Mogherini** will hold a series of bilateral meetings with the leaders of the region. Photos and videos will be available on [EBS](#). (For more information: Maja Kocijančič – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Alceo Smerilli – Tel.: +32 229 64887)

EU hosts annual meeting of the international donor coordination group in support of the Palestinian economy

The European Union will host on Tuesday the annual Spring meeting of the international donor coordination group in support of the Palestinian economy, the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC). The meeting is hosted by EU High Representative/Vice-President Federica **Mogherini**, and chaired by the Norwegian Foreign Minister Ine Eriksen Søreide. Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes **Hahn** will also participate. Since 1993, the AHLC has served as a key policy-level coordination mechanism for financial assistance to the Palestinian people, with a purpose of preserving the vision of a negotiated two-state solution. A press point with High Representative/Vice-President Federica **Mogherini** and Norwegian Foreign Minister Ine Eriksen Søreide will take place ahead of the meeting at approximately 13:45 at the VIP corner, in the Berlaymont building

(media advisory is available [online](#)). Earlier in the day, senior officials will take stock of progress achieved in the past twelve months as regards the implementation of the biggest ever investment project in Gaza: the [Gaza Central Desalination Plant](#). The available water in Gaza is among the lowest in the world and 97% is unfit for human consumption. This project meets the most urgent water needs, providing water for the two million Palestinians living in Gaza, contributing to the environmental sustainability and economic development of Gaza. Audio-visual coverage will be available on [EbS](#). A [factsheet](#) and a [video](#) on the Gaza Central Desalination Plant are online. *(For more information: Maja Kocijančič – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Matteo Arisci – Tel.: +32 229 80833; Alceo Smerilli – Tel.:+32 229 64887)*

Commissioner Stylianides speaks about global health emergencies at the Launch Event of the LSE Department of Health Policy

Tomorrow 30 April, Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos **Stylianides** will speak at the [official launch event of the new Department of Health Policy of the London School of Economics and Political Science](#) (LSE). He will present the Commission's important work in fighting Ebola, currently in the Democratic Republic of Congo and during the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014 as well as what the EU is doing to tackle health crises in emergencies. He will share his views together with Nobel Prize winners Sir Christopher Pissarides and Dr Denis Mukwege, and other high-profile speakers. The Commissioner will emphasise the need for a comprehensive approach in dealing with health emergencies around the globe. In 2018, EU humanitarian aid supported 178 health projects worldwide, for a total amount of almost €235 million. *(For more information: Carlos Martin Ruiz de Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Daniel Puglisi – Tel.: +32 229 69140)*

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

Strengthening the Commission's oversight in a modern and robust anti-fraud system

The new Strategy pushes for more consistency and better coordination in the fight against fraud among the various Commission departments and it paves the way for more data-driven anti-fraud measures in the coming years. The vision behind the new Strategy is to strengthen the corporate oversight of the Commission regarding all issues related to fraud and to reinforce the anti-

fraud system that is already in place.

Günther H. **Oettinger**, European Commissioner for Budget and Human Resources, said: *“The European Commission has zero tolerance to fraud. Every euro from the EU budget should be well spent and should create added value for the EU citizens. Today’s Strategy will help us stay focused on preventing, detecting and stopping fraud. We must always remain one step ahead of fraudsters.”*

Building on actions taken since 2011, the new Strategy seeks to make sure that the Commission makes the most out of the available data to prevent and detect fraud. It focuses on improving the quality and completeness of relevant information, on joining up different data sources and on creating smarter tools to draw operational conclusions.

The Strategy also seeks to reinforce the Commission’s corporate oversight of fraud issues, by giving the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) a much stronger advisory and supervisory role. OLAF will conduct mandatory reviews of the anti-fraud strategies of all Commission Directorates and monitor their implementation. It will liaise with all departments, and especially with the Heads of the Commission’s central services (Secretariat-General, Legal Service, DG Human Resources and DG Budget), in this process. This will strengthen the Commission’s overall governance of the anti-fraud system. In addition, the Commission will strengthen its follow-up of OLAF’s recommendations in order to ensure a better implementation.

Background

The Commission adopted its current Commission Anti-Fraud Strategy (CAFS) in 2011. It set out guidelines for the Commission’s fight against fraud, such as the principle of zero tolerance to fraud, and three priority actions, namely: (i) introducing anti-fraud provisions in Commission proposals on spending programmes under the Multi Annual Financial Framework for 2014-2020; (ii) implementing anti-fraud strategies at department level; and (iii) revising the public procurement directives. The general guidelines remain valid and the measures provided for in the 2011 CAFS have been fully implemented.

The Commission services performed an evaluation of the 2011 CAFS. The evaluation concluded that although the CAFS is still relevant and effective as a policy framework for the Commission in protecting the EU budget, it needs to adapt to an evolving situation (new funding schemes and fraud trends, development of IT tools, etc.). For the review of the CAFS, the Commission carried out a fraud risk assessment, involving the executive agencies.

The 2019 CAFS also addresses some key recommendations issued by the European Court of Auditors in a Special Report entitled “Fighting fraud in EU spending: action needed”.

The 2019 CAFS complements the Commission’s ‘Governance Package’, adopted in November 2018, which designates OLAF as the lead service in the conception and development of a European anti-fraud policy and further assigns a strategic role regarding corporate aspects of the fight against fraud to the

Corporate Management Board. The Corporate Management Board brings together the Commission's Secretary-General and the Directors-General of its central services (budget, human resources and legal affairs).

For more information

- [Package of the European Commission's Anti-Fraud Strategy 2019](#)
- [Communication on the Commission Anti-Fraud Strategy](#) (24 June 2011)
- [Special Report 'Fighting fraud in EU spending: actions needed' by the European Court of Auditors](#) (10 January 2019)
- [Corporate governance arrangements within the European Commission](#)
- [Announcements of Commissioner Günther H. Oettinger](#)

European Youth Week 2019: **'Democracy and me'**

From 29 April until 5 May, the ninth edition of European Youth Week is taking place across Europe. This year's theme is "Democracy and me". Alongside activities taking place all week in all participating countries, on 29 and 30 April flagship events in Brussels will bring together hundreds of young people to make their voices heard.

With a view to the upcoming European Parliament elections from 23 to 26 May, debates during this year's European Youth Week will focus on how young people can be active in their communities and influence democratic decisions.

On 30 April, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, **Tibor Navracsics**, will host a Citizens' Dialogue with young people, as well as a flagship debate in the European Parliament in Brussels, gathering more than 800 youth who will discuss democratic participation as well as the impact of the European Solidarity Corps on young people, NGOs and local communities.

Ahead of the European Youth Week, Commissioner **Navracsics** said: *"I applaud this generation of young Europeans who are active, committed and ready to support others. Almost 125,000 young people have now registered for the European Solidarity Corps, clearly indicating young people's will to engage in society. Our latest Eurobarometer survey on youth reveals that three out of four young people say they have been active in some form of civic activity, be it voting, joining a movement, signing a petition online or volunteering. I am proud and encourage young people to mobilise their peers to vote in the upcoming European Parliament elections so they have a voice in shaping their future."*

The results of a Eurobarometer survey released today show that for more than two thirds of young people (67%), priority number one for EU action over the next ten years should be protecting the environment and fighting climate change. The second and third priorities they identified are improving education and training, including free movement of students, apprentices or pupils (56%) and fighting poverty, economic and social inequalities (56%). In addition, 72% of young people interviewed say that, from the moment they were allowed to participate in elections until today, they voted in local, national, or European elections. The survey addressed around 11,000 young people aged between 15 and 30 years old in March 2019. Participants will have the opportunity to discuss these and other topics at European Youth Week events.

Moreover, this afternoon (29 April), Commissioner **Navracsics** will present the results of the [2018 Altiero Spinelli Awards for Outreach](#). This edition of the Altiero Spinelli Prize had a particular focus on young people and will reward projects that enhance their critical awareness of the European Union and their motivation to participate in the democratic processes that will shape its future. This edition attracted 79 applications and the five winning projects will be awarded at an event in Brussels.

Background

European Youth Week takes place every two years. It celebrates and promotes activities targeted at young people through events organised in all countries participating in the Erasmus+ programme. In addition to the Brussels flagship events, hundreds of activities and events are being organised locally. During the previous European Youth Week in 2017, 112,000 young people participated all across Europe and North Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Serbia and Turkey.

One of the main topics of this year's edition, the European Solidarity Corps, was announced by Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker in his [2016 State of the Union](#) address. It offers young people between the ages of 18 and 30 the opportunity to take part in a wide range of solidarity activities across the EU and beyond. Since its [launch on 7 December 2016](#), almost 125,000 young people have registered for the European Solidarity Corps, and almost 15,000 participants started their activity.

The Altiero Spinelli Awards are a European Parliament initiative implemented by the European Commission, awarded for the first time in 2017. The Awards aim at putting the spotlight on outstanding works that enhance citizens' understanding of the European Union and their motivation to participate in democratic processes.

The Commission will also publish during the 2019 European Youth Week new figures on the uptake of the Youth Guarantee and Youth Employment Initiative. The Youth Guarantee is a flagship initiative of the EU to foster youth employment, by making sure all young people under 25 receive a good quality offer of employment, continued education, apprenticeship or traineeship within a period of four months of becoming unemployed or leaving formal education.

For more information

[European Youth Week](#)

[European Solidarity Corps](#)

[Results of the 2018 Altiero Spinelli Prize](#)

[Eurobarometer](#): “How do we build a stronger, more united Europe?” – The views of young people

[Erasmus+](#)

[EUandMe campaign](#)

Antitrust: Commission accepts commitments by Mastercard and Visa to cut inter-regional interchange fees

Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said: *“Mastercard and Visa have committed to significantly reduce the interchange fees applied to payments made in Europe with cards issued elsewhere. The commitments, which are now binding on Visa and Mastercard, will reduce the costs borne by retailers for accepting payments with cards issued outside the EEA. This, together with our January 2019 decision on Mastercard’s cross-border card payment services, will lead to lower prices for European retailers to do business, ultimately to the benefit of all consumers”*

When a consumer uses a debit or a credit card in a shop or online, the bank of the retailer (the “acquiring bank”) pays a fee called “multilateral interchange fee” (“MIF”) to the cardholder’s bank (the “issuing bank”). The acquiring bank passes this fee to the retailer who includes it, like any other cost, in the final prices to all consumers, even to those who do not use cards.

Inter-regional interchange fees (also referred to as “**inter-regional MIFs**”) are MIFs applied to payments made in the European Economic Area (EEA) with consumer debit and credit cards issued outside the EEA. This would be the case, for example, when a US tourist uses a Mastercard or Visa card to pay a restaurant bill in Belgium.

The Mastercard and Visa networks set the level of MIFs (including inter-regional MIFs) applied by their licensee banks between them. In the absence of bilateral agreements between the banks, the level of the MIFs set by Mastercard or Visa networks applies by default. Retailers and consumers have

no means of influencing the level of MIFs.

Both **Mastercard** and **Visa** have now committed to reduce their respective **inter-regional MIFs**. These commitments, which will cut the inter-regional MIFs by on average 40%, will significantly reduce the costs for retailers in the EEA when they accept payments made with cards issued outside the EEA. This is expected to lead to lower prices to the benefit of all European consumers.

The Commission is the first competition authority in the world to intervene on inter-regional MIFs.

The Commission's concerns

The Commission outlined its competition concerns related to inter-regional MIFs in a [Statement of Objections addressed to Mastercard](#) on 9 July 2015 and a [Supplementary Statement of Objections addressed to Visa](#) on 3 August 2017.

In particular, the Commission was concerned that inter-regional MIFs may anti-competitively increase prices for European retailers accepting payments from cards issued outside the EEA and in turn lead to higher prices for consumer goods and services in the EEA.

The concerns identified by the Commission regarding the level of the MIFs are specific to this case and the inter-regional context.

The Commitments

Mastercard and Visa, each separately, offered commitments that would reduce the inter-regional MIFs by an average of 40%. Under the commitments, each of Mastercard and Visa undertake to:

1. **Reduce the current level of inter-regional interchange fees** to or below the following binding caps, within six months:
 - For card payments carried out by the cardholder in a shop (“Card Present Transactions”):
 - o 0.2% of the value of the transaction for debit cards;
 - o 0.3% of the value of the transaction for credit cards.
 - For online payments (“Card Not Present Transactions”):
 - o 1.15% of the value of the transaction for debit cards;
 - o 1.50% of the value of the transaction for credit cards.
2. **Refrain from circumventing these caps** by any measure equivalent in object or effect to inter-regional MIFs.
3. **Publish all inter-regional interchange fees** covered by the commitments in a clearly visible manner on their respective websites.

The commitments, which will apply for five years and six months, cover inter-regional interchange fees applied to payments made with the Mastercard,

Maestro, Visa, Visa Electron and V-PAY credit and debit card brands. A trustee will be appointed by the Commission to monitor the implementation of the commitments.

In [December 2018](#), the Commission consulted market participants to verify the appropriateness of the proposed commitments. In light of the Commission's analysis and the results of the market test, the Commission is satisfied that the commitments offered by Mastercard and Visa address its concerns.

In particular, the Commission concluded that, with the proposed inter-regional MIFs caps, the cost for retailers of accepting inter-regional consumer card payments does not exceed the cost of accepting alternative means for such payments, such as cash for Card Present Transactions and e-wallets (digital wallets) funded via bank transfers for Card Not Present Transactions.

Therefore, the Commission has made the commitments legally binding on Mastercard and Visa respectively.

Background

[Article 101 TFEU](#) and [Article 53 of the EEA Agreement](#) prohibit anticompetitive agreements and concerted practices, which may affect trade and prevent or restrict competition.

Article 9 of the EU's Antitrust Regulation ([Regulation EC \(No\) 1/2003](#)) allows the Commission to conclude antitrust proceedings by accepting commitments offered by a company. Such a decision does not reach a conclusion on whether EU antitrust rules have been infringed but legally binds the company to respect the commitments.

If a company breaches such commitments, the Commission can impose a fine of up to 10% of the company's worldwide turnover, without having to find an infringement of the EU antitrust rules. A policy brief on commitment decisions under Article 9 is available [here](#).

Most card transactions in the EEA are carried out with cards issued in the EEA. Over the past years, the Commission's antitrust decisions and EU Regulation have capped the interchange fees for those intra-EEA transactions:

- In [December 2007](#), the Commission found that MasterCard's interchange fees on cross-border transactions in the EEA (e.g. when a Belgian citizen uses his card to pay in a shop in France) restrict competition between banks. In [September 2014](#), the Court of Justice confirmed the Commission's findings.
- In 2009, to comply with the Commission's decision, MasterCard reduced the intra-EEA cross-border interchange fees applied by its member banks to maximum weighted averages of 0.2% for debit cards and 0.3% for credit cards.
- In [December 2010](#) and [February 2014](#) respectively, the Commission adopted decisions making legally binding commitments offered by Visa Europe (the former Visa scheme association of banks in Europe) to cap at the same

levels (0.2% and 0.3%) the interchange fees for all intra-EEA debit and credit card transactions.

- In April 2015, the European Parliament and the Council adopted the [Interchange Fee Regulation](#), which from December 2015 capped interchange fees for cards issued and used in Europe (maximum of 0.2% for debit cards and 0.3% for credit cards). The Interchange Fee Regulation established a level playing field for intra-EEA card payments. However, the caps of the Regulation do not apply to inter-regional transactions, as the Regulation does not apply to cards issued outside the EEA.
- In [January 2019](#), the Commission fined Mastercard €570 million for limiting the possibility for merchants to benefit from better conditions offered by banks established elsewhere in the Single Market, in breach of EU antitrust rules.

More information, including the full version of the commitments, is available on the Commission's [competition website](#), in the [public case register](#) under the case numbers [AT 39398](#) (Visa) and [AT 40049](#) (Mastercard).