

Daily News 26 / 04 / 2019

EU Justice Scoreboard 2019: results show the continuing need to protect judicial independence

Today, the European Commission publishes the 2019 EU Justice Scoreboard, which gives a comparative overview of the independence, quality and efficiency of justice systems in EU Member States. It provides national authorities with information to help them improve their justice systems. The results are mixed and show relative improvements with regard to the efficiency of justice systems and the quality of justice. At the same time, the Scoreboard shows there are growing challenges with regard to the perception of judicial independence. Věra **Jourová**, Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality said: *“The 2019 EU Justice Scoreboard comes at a time when challenges to the rule of law are mounting in some places in Europe. I am pleased to see that many countries continue to improve their judiciary. Sadly, some others are reversing the positive trends. There are still too many EU citizens who don’t see their justice systems as independent and who are waiting too long for justice to be served.”* Since 2013, the Justice Scoreboard analyses three main elements of an effective justice system: efficiency, quality and independence. The EU Justice Scoreboard is one of the tools in the [EU’s rule of law toolbox](#) used by the Commission to monitor justice reforms undertaken by Member States and feeds into the European Semester. The Commission is also publishing today the results of two EU-wide surveys on the perception of judicial independence by the [general public](#) and by [businesses](#). These results are taken into account in this edition of the Scoreboard. The full report is available [online](#), as well as a [press release](#) and a [Q&A](#). You can follow Commissioner **Jourová**’s press conference online [here](#). (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt– Tel.: +32 229-67083; Melanie Voin – Tel.: +32 229 58659)

26th EU-Japan Summit outcome: Taking our strong partnership to a higher level

The 26th EU-Japan Summit, which took place in Brussels yesterday, focussed on the implementation of two landmark agreements concluded last year: the EU-Japan [Strategic Partnership Agreement](#) and [Economic Partnership Agreement](#). *“This is a truly historic time for Japan, with its current presidency of the G20 and the accession of Crown Prince Naruhito as Emperor next week. Japan can rely on the European Union on both counts: to strengthen multilateralism, and to support its new era of Reiwa, which means “beautiful harmony” and perfectly sums up our partnership”,* [said](#) President Jean-Claude **Juncker**, who represented the European Union at the Summit with Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzō Abe, alongside the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk. *“Our new Economic Partnership Agreement is a landmark moment for global trade. The vast majority of the €1 billion of duties paid annually by EU companies exporting to Japan and vice-versa have been removed. This will help trade between us increase by up to nearly €36 billion. We now need to ensure that this success story continues by making sure we stay on track with the*

implementation”, said President **Juncker**. The Summit delivered a number of concrete outcomes, which are detailed in a [Joint Summit Statement](#) as well as a [full press release](#). These include a joint commitment to strengthen cooperation on global issues and the rules-based international order with multilateralism, democracy, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, open markets and a global trading system with the World Trade Organisation at its core; working together on international initiatives on data protection; a new EU-Japan Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure; and discussions on addressing regional and foreign policy issues, and strengthening the EU-Japan security partnership. For more information on EU-Japan relations, consult the [dedicated factsheet](#) and the [website of the EU Delegation in Tokyo](#). (For more information: Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 229 91382; Maja Kocijancic – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Adam Kaznowski – Tel.: +32 229 89359)

Promoting innovation: €33 million to help bring top-class projects to market

The European Commission has selected 13 projects to receive a total of €33.12 million to bring innovations faster to the market. The funding comes from the [pilot phase of the European Innovation Council \(EIC\)](#), which targets fast-moving and high-risk innovation with strong potential to create new markets. The 13 projects, involving 54 partners in 17 countries, will receive around €2 million each with this round of the [Fast Track to Innovation \(FTI\)](#) under the EIC. The range of projects include recycling technology for rubber from old tyres, a magnetic ink barcode reader for anti-counterfeiting purposes, next generation photovoltaic windows, and a neuro-prosthesis that allows amputees to feel sensory feedback from the prosthesis. Carlos **Moedas**, Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation, said: “With the new European Innovation Council we support high-risk breakthrough innovation. Today we award support to a range of amazing projects that connect industrial partners, big corporates and innovative SMEs, creating new markets and jobs for European citizens.” The Fast Track to Innovation promotes innovative activities at the close-to-the-market stage under the [EIC](#). It supports mature innovative concepts that have already been tested. The EIC will become a full-fledged reality from 2021 under the [next EU research and innovation programme Horizon Europe](#). More information and a list of the beneficiaries are available [online](#). (For more information: Lucía Caudet – Tel.: +32 229 56282; Victoria von Hammerstein – Tel.: +32 229 55040; Mirna Talko – Tel.: +32 229 87278)

Concentrations: la Commission européenne autorise l’acquisition de ProFamily par Agos

La Commission européenne a approuvé, en vertu du règlement européen sur les concentrations, l’acquisition de ProFamily S.p.A. , basée en Italie, par Agos Ducato S.p.A. (« Agos »), basée en Italie et contrôlée conjointement par Crédit Agricole Consumer Finance S.A. (« CACF »), basée en France, et Banco BPM S.p.A. (« BBPM »), basée en Italie. ProFamily est une filiale de BBPM, un

groupe bancaire opérant dans le secteur du crédit à la consommation en Italie. CACF est une filiale du groupe Crédit Agricole qui est actif dans le secteur du crédit à la consommation en France et dans plusieurs autres pays européens. L'acquisition de ProFamily vise à regrouper au sein d'Agos l'ensemble des activités de crédit à la consommation de BBPM. Les activités de ProFamily qui ne sont pas distribuées par l'intermédiaire du réseau bancaire de BBPM ne font pas partie de l'opération et seront vendues à des tiers ou abandonnées. La Commission a conclu que la concentration envisagée ne soulèverait pas de problèmes de concurrence, compte tenu de son impact limité sur la structure de marché. L'opération 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.9288](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Lucía Caudet – Tél. +32 229 56182; Giulia Astuti – Tél.: +32 229 55344)

Eurostat : Indicateurs Europe 2020 sur l'éducation en 2018 : plus de 40% des 30-34 ans dans l'UE sont diplômés de l'enseignement supérieur

Aujourd'hui, Eurostat, l'office statistique de l'Union européenne, publie les données les plus récentes pour l'UE et ses États membres concernant les progrès accomplis sur les deux grands objectifs Europe 2020 en matière d'éducation. L'un des objectifs de la stratégie Europe 2020 est qu'au moins 40% des 30-34 ans dans l'Union européenne (UE) obtiennent, d'ici 2020, un diplôme d'enseignement supérieur. En 2018, l'UE a atteint cet objectif avec un pourcentage de 40,7%. Cette part n'a cessé de croître depuis le début de la série en 2002, lorsqu'elle était de 23,6%. Cette tendance est encore plus significative pour les femmes (de 24,5% en 2002 à 45,8% en 2018, soit au-dessus de l'objectif global Europe 2020), que pour les hommes (de 22,6% à 35,7%, soit toujours en-dessous de l'objectif global Europe 2020). Dans le même temps, la part des jeunes (âgés de 18 à 24 ans) ayant quitté prématurément l'éducation et la formation a régulièrement diminué dans l'UE, passant de 17,0% en 2002 à 10,6% en 2018. Les jeunes femmes (8,9%) sont moins affectées par ce phénomène que les jeunes hommes (12,2%). L'objectif Europe 2020 est de réduire les taux de décrochage scolaire dans l'UE à moins de 10% d'ici 2020. Un communiqué de presse complet est disponible [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tél.: +32 229 67083; Inga Höglund – Tél.: +32 2 29 50698)

Eurostat : Près de 20 000 mineurs non accompagnés parmi les demandeurs d'asile dans l'UE en 2018

En 2018, 19 700 demandeurs d'asile sollicitant une protection internationale dans les États membres de l'Union européenne (UE) étaient considérés comme étant des mineurs non accompagnés. Cela représente une diminution de plus d'un tiers par rapport à 2017 (31 400) et un retour à un niveau inférieur à celui enregistré en 2014 (23 100), date à laquelle une première augmentation avait été enregistrée par rapport à la période 2008-2013 durant laquelle un nombre de demandes relativement constant d'environ 12 000 par an avait été enregistré. En 2018, au niveau de l'UE, les mineurs non accompagnés

représentaient 10% de l'ensemble des demandeurs d'asile âgés de moins de 18 ans en 2018. Un communiqué de presse complet est disponible [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Natasha Bertaud – Tél.: +32 229 67456; Tove Ernst – Tél.: +32 229 86764)

STATEMENTS

Vaccination: Time to speak out against disinformation!

On the occasion of the European Immunisation Week and the publication of the Eurobarometer survey on attitudes towards vaccination, Vice President for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness Jyrki **Katainen** said:
"Vaccination is one of the most successful public health measures to date. Not only do vaccines prevent diseases and save lives, they also reduce healthcare costs. Unfortunately, those of us who read the news have undoubtedly seen striking headlines about the rise of outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases in recent years, resulting in severe health consequences and sometimes – avoidable deaths. The World Health Organization has named vaccine disinformation as one of the top 10 public health threats this year. But, does this mean that the trust in science is eroding? We have some good news: as shown in the first Eurobarometer on attitudes towards vaccination published today, 85 % of EU citizens believe vaccination is an effective way to prevent infectious diseases, to protect yourself and others. Herd immunity is crucial, particularly when one has a compromised immune system and cannot be vaccinated. The Eurobarometer also shows that around half of EU citizens have been vaccinated in the last five years and a large majority (79%) consult and trust a healthcare professional to get information about vaccinations. The latter data confirms the Commission's initiative, together with the Coalition of Healthcare Workers, puts us on the right path to raising awareness effectively. We will continue to roll out all the actions included in the Council Recommendation on strengthened cooperation against vaccine-preventable diseases, and I am glad to announce that the Commission and WHO will be hosting a [Global Vaccination Summit](#) on 12 September 2019 in Brussels." Read the full statement [here](#). Read the Eurobarometer results [here](#) and vaccination overview [here](#). (For more information: Anca Paduraru – Tel.: +32 229 91269; Aikaterini Apostola – Tel.: +32 229 87624)

[CALENDAR](#) – Commissioner's weekly activities

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

[Justice Scoreboard – Questions and Answers](#)

What is the EU Justice Scoreboard?

The EU Justice Scoreboard is a comparative information tool that aims to assist the EU and Member States to improve the effectiveness of national justice systems. It does this by providing objective, reliable and comparable data on the quality, independence and efficiency of the justice systems in all Member States.

The Scoreboard contributes to identifying good practices, improvements and potential shortcomings. It shows trends in the functioning of national justice systems over time. It does not present an overall single ranking, but an overview of how all the justice systems function. This is based on various indicators that are of common interest to all Member States.

The Scoreboard does not promote any particular type of justice system, whatever the model of the national justice system – or the legal tradition in which it is anchored – timeliness, independence, affordability and user-friendly access are some of the essential features of an effective justice system.

Why are national justice systems important for the EU?

Justice systems play a crucial role in upholding the rule of law and the EU's fundamental values. They ensure that individuals and businesses can fully enjoy their rights, strengthen mutual trust, and help to build a business and investment-friendly environment in the single market. This is why improving the effectiveness of national justice systems is one of the priorities of the [European Semester](#) – the EU's annual cycle of economic policy coordination. The EU Justice Scoreboard helps Member States to achieve this priority.

What are the main novelties in the seventh edition of the EU Justice Scoreboard?

The 2019 edition develops further certain aspects of the functioning of justice systems:

- **Judicial independence:** new indicators on the authorities involved in disciplinary proceedings regarding judges, in the main management powers over national prosecution services, and in the appointment and dismissal of national prosecutors;
- **Investment in justice systems:** new overview on how financial resources are spent in each justice system;
- **Quality of justice:** a new overview on the standards used in highest courts to improve the quality of judgments, in cooperation with the European judicial networks (Association of the Councils of State and Supreme Administrative Jurisdictions of the EU and the Network of the Presidents of the Supreme Judicial Courts of the EU).

The Scoreboard also presents:

- How citizens and companies perceive the independence of judges compared to previous years (see [2019 Eurobarometer survey](#) on 'Perceived independence of the national justice systems in the EU among the general public' and 2019 [Eurobarometer survey](#) on 'Perceived independence of the

national justice systems in the EU among companies’).

- How legal aid and court fees impact access to justice;
- Access to justice for more vulnerable groups, such as children, visually or hearing impaired people, victims of gender-based violence, non-native speakers.

What are the main findings of the 2019 EU Justice Scoreboard?

- **Positive trend on efficiency:** data on efficiency spanning over eight years (2010-2017) show that positive developments can be observed in most of the Member States which have been identified in the context of the European Semester as facing specific challenges.
- **Investment on justice remained stable:** overall, in 2017, general government total expenditure on law courts remained mostly stable in Member States. The breakdown of this expenditure into different categories, such as salaries, court buildings, software, building rentals or legal aids, however reveals significant differences in spending patterns among Member States.
- **Challenges as regards perception of judicial independence remain:** In about two-thirds of Member States, the perception of judicial independence has improved when compared to 2016. However, compared to last year, the public’s perception of independence decreased in more than two-thirds of Member States identified in the European Semester as facing specific challenges. The most stated reason for the perceived lack of independence of courts and judges is the interference or pressure from government and politicians.
- **Most Member States ensure quality of judgments through training of judges:** regarding the standards used in highest courts to improve the quality of judgments, most courts provide specific training to judges on the structure, style of reasoning and drafting of judgments. In some Member States, court users have access to mechanisms to obtain clarifications regarding court decisions, an interesting practice to improve citizen-friendly justice systems.
- **Safeguards for national prosecution services and disciplinary proceedings vary:** Regarding the national prosecution services, the EU Justice Scoreboard shows that in some Member States there is a certain level of concentration in one single authority of the main management powers. In addition, in most countries, the Council for the Judiciary/Prosecutorial Council or the prosecution service is involved in the appointment and dismissal of national prosecutors. As to disciplinary proceedings regarding judges, in most Member States, the authority deciding on disciplinary sanctions is an independent authority such as a court or a Council for the judiciary. In some Member States, it is a special court whose members are specifically selected or appointed by the Council for the Judiciary, by Judges or, in one Member State, by the Minister of Justice.
- **Caseload in competition area is decreasing:** the overall caseload faced by courts across Member States decreased significantly resulting in reduced length of judicial review in seven Member States.
- **Use of ICT tools still limited in some countries:** many Member States have not yet implemented ICT case management system to their full

potential and no improvements have been achieved compared to previous years. In some Member States, it is still not possible to ensure nationwide data collection across all justice area.

- **Limited access to justice for poorer citizens:** the Scoreboard confirms that in some Member States, citizens whose income is below the poverty threshold do not receive any legal aid in certain types of disputes. Compared to last year, two of such Member States have made legal aid more accessible. The difficulty in benefiting from legal aid, together with sometimes significant levels of court fees in some Member States, could have a deterrent effect on people in poverty to access justice.
- **Length of money laundering proceedings remains a challenge:** data show that in about half of Member States first instance court proceedings in the fight against money laundering take up to a year on average. In some Member States facing challenges they can take on average two or more years.

What is the relation between the EU Justice Scoreboard and the EU's rule of law toolbox?

The EU Justice Scoreboard is one of the tools of the [EU's rule of law toolbox](#).

The annual EU Justice Scoreboard looks at a range of indicators to assess the independence, quality and efficiency of national justice systems. This comparative tool is complemented by country specific assessments, presented in the European Semester Country Reports, which enable to make a deeper analysis based on the national legal and institutional context.

The EU's rule of law toolbox consists of a wide range of tools to carefully monitor, assess, and respond to the rule of law issues in Member States, among others infringement procedures, the European Semester, the EU Justice Scoreboard, the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM), the Rule of Law Framework and the procedure of Article 7 TEU.

The Commission, in its [Communication to further strengthening the Rule of Law](#) published on 3 April, has invited EU institutions and Member States, as well other stakeholders, to contribute ideas to how the rule of law toolbox could develop in the future.

Building on this reflection process and the ongoing debate, the Commission will return to this issue with its own conclusions and proposals in June 2019.

What is the European Semester?

The [European Semester](#) is the EU's yearly cycle of economic, fiscal and social policy coordination. Each year the European Commission undertakes a detailed analysis of EU Member States' plans for macroeconomic, budgetary and structural reforms and issues recommendations for the next 12-18 months to be adopted by the Council. The European Semester cycle starts in November with

the publication of the Commission's [Annual Growth Survey](#) and the Commission's proposal for a Council recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area. The Annual Growth Survey sets out general economic and social priorities for the EU and provides Member States with generic policy guidance for the following year. The euro area recommendation provides tailored advice to euro area Member States on issues relevant for the functioning of the euro area as a whole.

In the 2019 Annual Growth Survey, the Commission underlines that “well-performing public institutions contribute to higher growth and are a precondition for the successful delivery of other reforms” and that “this includes (...) respect for the rule of law”. It also stresses that “the rule of law, effective justice systems and robust anti-corruption frameworks are crucial to attracting business and enabling economic growth. This relates in particular to the independence and efficiency of court systems as well as a comprehensive approach to fighting corruption, which combines prevention, effective prosecution and sanctions”.

The [2019 Recommendation for the Euro Area](#) as endorsed by the European Council on 21-22 March 2019 highlights the need to improve the quality of institutions and in particular the effectiveness of justice systems.

How does the EU Justice Scoreboard contribute to the European Semester?

The Scoreboard looks at a range of indicators to assess the independence, quality and efficiency of national justice systems and helps assessing the impact of justice reforms in Member States. If the Scoreboard reveals poor performance, the reasons behind it always require deeper analysis of the national legal and institutional context. This country-specific assessment is carried out in the context of the European Semester process through bilateral dialogue with the authorities and stakeholders concerned.

The country-specific assessment takes into account the particularities of the legal system and the context of the concerned Member State. It may eventually lead the Commission to propose that the Council adopts Country-Specific Recommendations on the improvement of national justice systems.

How can effective justice systems support growth?

Effective justice which uphold the rule of law have since a long time been identified as having a positive economic impact. Where judicial systems guarantee the enforcement of rights, creditors are more likely to lend, businesses are dissuaded from opportunistic behaviour, transaction costs are reduced and innovative businesses are more likely to invest.

The beneficial impact of well-functioning national justice systems for the economy is supported by a wide range of studies and academic literature, including from the [European Central Bank](#), [the International Monetary Fund](#), the [OECD](#), the [World Economic Forum](#) and [the World Bank](#).

How does the 2019 EU Justice Scoreboard examine the effectiveness of justice?

The Scoreboard uses indicators that examine the three main features of an

effective justice system: efficiency, quality and independence.

- **Efficiency**

The indicators related to the efficiency of proceedings include: the caseload, the length of judicial proceedings (disposition time); the clearance rate (the ratio of the number of resolved cases over the number of incoming cases), and the number of pending cases. The Scoreboard also presents the average length of proceedings in specific fields when EU law is involved.

Easy access to justice, adequate resources, effective assessment tools and appropriate standards are key factors that contribute to the quality of justice systems. The Scoreboard uses various indicators to cover these factors: such as the electronic submission of claims, communication between the courts and parties, the training of judges, financial resources, and ICT case management systems and standards.

- **Independence**

The Scoreboard examines the perception of judicial independence both among the general public and companies. It also presents information on legal safeguards in Member States for certain situations where judicial independence could be at risk, and overviews on the organisation of national prosecution services.

What is the methodology of the EU Justice Scoreboard?

The Scoreboard uses various sources of information. Large parts of the quantitative data are provided by the Council of Europe Commission for the Evaluation of the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) with which the Commission has concluded a contract to carry out a specific annual study. This data ranges from 2010 to 2017, and has been provided by Member States according to CEPEJ's methodology. The study also provides detailed comments and country-specific fact sheets that give more contextual information and should be read together with the figures.

The other sources of data are the groups of contact persons on national justice systems, the [European Network of Councils for the Judiciary \(ENCJ\)](#), the [Network of the Presidents of the Supreme Judicial Courts of the EU](#), [Association of the Councils of State and Supreme Administrative Jurisdictions of the EU \(ACA\)](#), the [European Competition Network](#), the [Communications Committee](#), the [European Observatory on infringements of intellectual property rights](#), the [Expert Group on Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism](#), [Eurostat](#), the [European Judicial Training Network \(EJTN\)](#), and the [World Economic Forum](#).

Why are some data missing?

Although data are still lacking for certain Member States, the data gap continues to decrease. The remaining difficulties in gathering data are often due to insufficient statistical capacity or the fact that the national categories for which data is collected do not exactly correspond to the ones

used for the Scoreboard. In very few cases, the data gap is due to the lack of national authorities' willingness to contribute. The Commission will continue to encourage Member States to further reduce this data gap.

For further information

[Press release](#)

EU Justice Scoreboard 2019: results show the continuing need to protect judicial independence

It provides national authorities with information to help them improve their justice systems. The results are mixed and show relative improvements with regard to the efficiency of justice systems and the quality of justice. At the same time, the Scoreboard shows there are growing challenges with regard to the perception of judicial independence.

Věra **Jourová**, European Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality said: *"The 2019 EU Justice Scoreboard comes at a time when challenges to the rule of law are mounting in some places in Europe. I am pleased to see that many countries continue to improve their judiciary. Sadly, some others are reversing the positive trends. There are still too many EU citizens who don't see their justice systems as independent and who are waiting too long for justice to be served."*

The seventh edition of the EU Justice Scoreboard continues to develop the different indicators and deepens its focus on judicial independence as a key element to uphold the rule of law in Member States.

One of the new elements of the 2019 EU Justice Scoreboard is that it provides an overview of disciplinary regimes regarding judges in national justice systems and safeguards in place to prevent political control of judicial decisions. The Scoreboard also presents the management of powers over national prosecution services justice systems, including the appointment and dismissal of prosecutors, which are key indicators for the independence of a prosecution service.

The key findings of the 2019 edition include:

- **Some positive trends on the efficiency of justice systems:** The Scoreboard shows that over eight years (2010-2017) positive developments can be observed in most of the Member States identified in the European Semester as facing specific challenges. Since 2010, in nearly all of those Member States, the length of first instance court proceedings has

decreased or at least remained stable. Moreover, first instance proceedings in money laundering court cases take up to a year on average. However, in some Member States facing challenges in this area, proceedings can still take two or more years.

- **Challenges as regards perception of judicial independence are growing:** According to a Eurobarometer survey published today, in two-thirds of Member States, the perception of judicial independence has improved, as compared to 2016. However, compared to last year, the public's perception of independence has decreased in about three-fifths of all Member States^[1]. Possible political interference or pressure is the main reason for the perceived lack of independence of courts and judges. For national prosecution services, the Scoreboard shows that there is a tendency in some Member States to concentrate management powers, such as evaluation, promotion, transfer of prosecutors, in the hands of a single authority.
- **Quality of justice:** overall, in 2017, general government expenditure on law courts remained stable across the EU. To improve the quality of judgments (based on data from European judicial networks) most courts provide specific training to judges on the structure and style of reasoning and drafting of judgments. In some Member States, court users can ask for clarifications of court decisions. Compared to previous years, online access to court judgments has improved, especially as regards the publication of judgments of the highest instance: 19 Member States now publish all civil/commercial and administrative judgments.

Next steps

The findings of the 2019 Scoreboard were already taken into account for the country-specific assessment carried out within the 2019 European Semester. The findings will also feed into the preparation of the Commission proposals for the 2019 country-specific recommendations.

These policy recommendations are discussed amongst Member States in the Council. EU leaders endorse them in June before the Council adopts them in July. Governments then incorporate the recommendations into their reform plans and national budgets for the following year.

Background

Launched in 2013, the EU Justice Scoreboard is one of the tools in the [EU's rule of law toolbox](#) used by the Commission to monitor justice reforms undertaken by Member States and feeds into the [European Semester](#). The annual EU Justice Scoreboard assesses the independence, quality and efficiency of national justice systems. This comparative tool is complemented by country-specific assessments, presented in the Country Reports, which enable a deeper analysis based on the national legal and institutional context.

The Scoreboard focuses on the three main elements of an effective justice system:

- **Efficiency:** indicators on the length of proceedings, clearance rate and

number of pending cases.

- **Quality:** indicators on accessibility, such as legal aid and court fees, training, monitoring of court activities, budget, human resources and standards on the quality of judgments.
- **Independence:** indicators on the perceived judicial independence among the general public and companies, on safeguards relating to judges and on safeguards relating to the functioning of national prosecution services.

Improving the effectiveness of national justice systems is a well-established priority of the European semester – the EU’s annual cycle of economic policy coordination. The EU Justice Scoreboard helps Member States to achieve this by providing an annual comparative overview of the functioning of national justice systems. When serious challenges are identified in individual country reports, the Council, on a proposal from the Commission, adopts targeted country-specific recommendations.

For More Information

[EU Justice Scoreboard 2019](#)

[Summary of the 2019 EU Justice Scoreboard: Factsheet](#)

[Annotated graphs with full figures](#)

[Questions and Answers](#)

[Eurobarometer on ‘Perceived independence of the national justice systems in the EU among the general public’](#)

[Eurobarometer on ‘Perceived independence of the national justice systems in the EU among companies’](#)

[European Semester 2019 Country Reports](#)

[Communication on further strengthening the Rule of Law within the Union](#)

Factsheet [EU’s rule of law toolbox](#)

[1] AT, NL, DE, LU, BE, EE, EL, CZ, PT, HU, RO, PL, ES, BG, SK, HR

Daily News 24 / 04 / 2019

Cohesion Policy invests to improve energy security in Poland

The European Commission welcomes the signature today of a grant agreement between the Polish government and the Polskie LNG company for the extension of the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) terminal in Świnoujście, in north-western

Poland on the Baltic Sea coast. Almost €128 million from the European Regional Development Fund is invested in extending this terminal, which is the only facility of its size in Northern, Central and Eastern Europe. Commissioner for Regional Policy Corina Crețu said: *“The extension of the Świnoujście terminal will help diversify natural gas supply sources and improve the country’s energy security. This is a new example of the Energy Union in motion, supported by Cohesion Policy.”* The current investment comes on top of more than €250 million of Cohesion Policy funds already invested in the terminal and more than €2 billion invested in Polish energy infrastructure since 2007. The terminal expansion project is on the European list of Projects of Common Interest (PCI). Together with the ‘Baltic Pipe’ project, for which a [€215 million EU grant](#) was signed just last week, the new LNG terminal in Świnoujście will open Poland’s gas market to new suppliers enhancing the diversity and security of energy sources in Poland. The Baltic pipe will allow, as of 2022, the shipment of gas from the North Sea to the Polish market and further to the Baltic States and neighbouring countries. At the same time, the pipeline will enable the supply of gas from Poland, via the LNG terminal, to the Danish and Swedish markets. *(For more information: Christian Spahr – Tel.: +32 229 50055; Sophie Dupin de Saint-Cyr – Tel.: +32 229 56169)*

Commission proposes tax exemption measures to facilitate common defence efforts in the context of the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)

The European Commission has today adopted a proposal to exempt supplies to armed forces from Value Added Tax (VAT) and excise duties when these forces are deployed outside their own Member State and take part in a European defence effort. Supplies to armed forces participating in a NATO defence effort can already benefit from such exemptions. Today’s proposal should therefore ensure equal treatment of defence efforts under the NATO and the EU framework when it comes to VAT and excise duties. Under the new rules, armed forces deployed outside their own Member State would not pay VAT or excise duty to other Member States when they take part in a NATO defence effort or in a defence activity under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). By aligning the indirect tax treatment of both defence efforts, the initiative acknowledges the growing importance of the CSDP and military mobility which require supplies such as training materials, accommodation, provision of food and fuel – all in principle currently subject to VAT. The full proposal is available [here](#). *(For more information: Annika Breidhardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153; Patrick McCullough – Tel.: +32 229 87183)*

Food Safety: Commission adopts new Regulation to cut down presence of trans fatty acids

Today, the Commission adopted a new Regulation to set a maximum limit on the use of industrially produced [trans-fat](#) in foods in the EU. The measure aims at protecting consumers’ health and providing Europeans with healthier food options. Over the years, a number of scientific studies, including one from the [European Food Safety Authority](#), have stressed that the dietary intakes of trans fat should be as low as possible in order to avoid health risks. The maximum limit set today corresponds to 2 grams of industrially produced trans fats per 100 grams of fat in the food intended for the final consumer and

food intended for the supply to retail. Also, businesses must provide information on the amounts of trans fat in food supplied to other businesses if the limit of 2 grams is exceeded. This Regulation will apply as from 2 April 2021. *(For more information: Anca Paduraru – Tel.: +32 229 91269; Aikaterini Apostola – Tel.: +32 229 87624)*

La Commission européenne lance une consultation publique sur la coopération Afrique-UE dans le secteur agro-alimentaire

La Commission européenne a lancé une [consultation publique](#) sur le programme agroalimentaire et rural pour la nouvelle “[Alliance Afrique-Europe pour des emplois et des investissements durables](#)” dévoilé en mars 2019 par la [Task Force pour l’Afrique rurale](#). La consultation vise à recueillir les réactions des personnes et organisations concernées et se concentre sur les recommandations proposées par ce groupe d’experts indépendants africains et européens pour renforcer le partenariat Afrique-Europe dans les domaines de l’alimentation et de l’agriculture. La Task Force avait entre autres conseillé que l’Afrique et l’UE développent un partenariat à trois niveaux: interpersonnel, interentreprises et intergouvernemental. Un dialogue multipartite serait ainsi institué à tous les niveaux, local tout d’abord, et permettrait un rapprochement entre les sociétés, les milieux d’affaires et les gouvernements d’Afrique et d’Europe. La consultation est ouverte jusqu’au 31 mai et ses résultats seront pris en compte lors de la troisième conférence ministérielle Union Africaine-UE sur l’agriculture, qui se tiendra à Rome le 21 juin 2019. Il s’agira de la première occasion politique pour l’UE et l’UA de débattre conjointement des recommandations prônées par la Task Force et de s’accorder sur les prochaines mesures à prendre pour le secteur agroalimentaire et rural au sein de l’alliance Afrique-Europe. *(Pour plus d’informations: Daniel Rosario – Tel.: +32 229 56185; Clémence Robin – Tel.: +32 229 52509)*

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of RPC by Berry

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of sole control of RPC Group Plc (“RPC”) of the United Kingdom by Berry Global Group, Inc. (“Berry”) of the US. RPC is active in the manufacture of plastic products, including packaging and non-packaging. Berry is active in the manufacture of plastic packaging, non-woven specialty materials and engineered materials. The Commission concluded that the proposed transaction would raise no competition concerns given the limited horizontal overlaps and vertical relationships between the companies’ activities. 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.9311](#). *(For more information: Lucía Caudet – Tel. +32 229 56182; ; Giulia Astuti – Tel.: +32 229 55344)*

Eurostat: La dette publique en baisse à 85,1% du PIB dans la zone euro, en baisse à 80,0% du PIB dans l’UE28 (4ème trimestre 2018 par rapport au 3ème trimestre 2018)

À la fin du quatrième trimestre 2018, le ratio de la dette publique par rapport au PIB s'est établi à 85,1% dans la zone euro (ZE19), contre 86,4% à la fin du troisième trimestre 2018. Dans l'UE28, le ratio a diminué, passant de 81,0% à 80,0%. Par rapport au quatrième trimestre 2017, le ratio de la dette publique par rapport au PIB a baissé tant dans la zone euro (de 87,1% à 85,1%) que dans l'UE28 (de 81,7% à 80,0%). À la fin du quatrième trimestre 2018, les titres de créances représentaient 80,9% de la dette publique de la zone euro et 81,6% de celle de l'UE28, les crédits respectivement 16,0% et 14,2%, et le numéraire et dépôts 3,1% et 4,1%. En raison de l'implication des gouvernements de l'UE dans l'aide financière à certains États membres, des données trimestrielles sur les prêts intergouvernementaux sont également publiées. À la fin du quatrième trimestre 2018, la part des prêts intergouvernementaux dans le PIB s'établissait à 2,0% dans la zone euro et à 1,5% dans l'UE28. Ces chiffres sont publiés par Eurostat, l'office statistique de l'Union européenne. Un communiqué de presse est disponible [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Annika Breidhardt – Tél.: +32 229 56153; Annikky Lamp – Tél.: +32 229 56151)

Eurostat: Déficit public désaisonnalisé de la zone euro en hausse à 1,0% du PIB, en hausse à 0,9% du PIB dans l'UE28 (4ème trimestre 2018)

Au quatrième trimestre 2018, le ratio du déficit public par rapport au PIB, corrigé des variations saisonnières, s'est établi à 1,0% dans la zone euro (ZE19), en hausse par rapport au troisième trimestre 2018 où il se situait à 0,5%. Dans l'UE28, le ratio du déficit public par rapport au PIB s'est établi à 0,9%, contre 0,5% au trimestre précédent. Ces données sont publiées par Eurostat, l'office statistique de l'Union européenne. Au quatrième trimestre 2018, les recettes publiques totales se sont établies dans la zone euro à 46,2% du PIB, en baisse par rapport au troisième trimestre 2018 (46,3%). Les dépenses publiques totales dans la zone euro se sont quant à elles établies à 47,2% du PIB, en hausse par rapport au trimestre précédent (46,8%). Dans l'UE28, les recettes publiques totales ont représenté 45,0% du PIB au quatrième trimestre 2018, en baisse par rapport au troisième trimestre 2018 (45,1%). Les dépenses publiques totales dans l'UE28 se sont quant à elles établies à 45,9% du PIB, contre 45,6% au trimestre précédent. Un communiqué de presse est disponible [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Annika Breidhardt – Tél.: +32 229 56153; Annikky Lamp – Tél.: +32 229 56151)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Commissioner Hogan opens “Our Forests, Our Future” conference in Brussels

Commissioner for agriculture Phil **Hogan** will open tomorrow morning 25 April the [“Our Forests, Our Future” conference](#) which will celebrate forests for their role in combating climate change. The debates will also address the contribution of the forest sector to innovation, growth and jobs, with a specific focus on the bioeconomy. Commissioners **Arias Cañete** and **Mimica** will also deliver speeches and participate in two panel discussions during the

two-day conference. The final session on Friday 26 April will focus on protecting forests and promoting sustainable forest management at global level, in line with the [work on global deforestation](#) that the European Commission is currently preparing. Forests and other wooded land cover about 40% of the EU territory, and the forest sector provides more than 3.5 million jobs in the European Union. As stated in the [Cork 2.0 Declaration](#), forests and the forest sector can significantly contribute to delivering sustainable solutions to current and future challenges such as reducing the reliance on fossil fuels, protecting biodiversity and adapting to climate change. To conclude the event and mark the EU's commitment to a sustainable forestry sector, Commissioner **Hogan**, accompanied by children, will plant a tree in the Parc du Cinquantenaire. The full programme is [online](#) and the discussions can be followed online with the hashtag #EUforest. Following his opening speech, Commissioner **Hogan** will hold a press point at 10h30 tomorrow in the Charlemagne building. *(For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel: +32 229 56185; Clemence Robin – Tel.: +32 229 52509)*

Commissioner Thyssen visits Lithuania

On 24 and 25 April, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne **Thyssen**, will pay a two-day visit to Lithuania. Upon arrival, the Commissioner will visit a Deaf Rehabilitation Centre, a project funded by the [European Social Fund](#). The Centre works on providing assistance for the deaf in finding the information on employment opportunities and helping them to get the necessary skills to enter the labour market. In the evening, she will have a working dinner with the Lithuanian Minister of Social Security and Labour, Mr Linas Kukuraitis, to discuss the European Semester. On Thursday, Commissioner **Thyssen** will meet with H.E. Dalia Grybauskaitė, President of the Republic of Lithuania. Following the meeting, the Commissioner will participate in a [High-Level International Conference Towards a Digitalised World of Work, "What Future Works for All?"](#). She will give an introductory speech, which will be made available [here](#). The Commissioner will also participate in the plenary session on how the use of new technologies will affect the future of work. A press conference will take place at 11:20 (local time). To conclude the visit, Commissioner **Thyssen** will meet with the Lithuanian Minister of Finance, Mr Vilius Šapoka, to discuss the current and future long-term EU budget. *(For more information: Christian Wigand– Tel.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: + 32 229 67094)*

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

[Fourth quarter of 2018 – Seasonally](#)

adjusted government deficit increased to 1.0% of GDP in the euro area – Up to 0.9% of GDP in the EU28

In the fourth quarter of 2018, the seasonally adjusted general government deficit to GDP ratio stood at 1.0% in the **euro area** (EA19), an increase compared with 0.5% in the third quarter of 2018. In the **EU28**, the deficit to GDP ratio stood at 0.9%, an increase compared with 0.5% in the previous quarter.

[Full text available on EUROSTAT website](#)