

Digital Europe programme – Coreper confirms common understanding reached with Parliament

The EU is supporting the **digitisation of its economies and societies** by setting up a **new funding programme, Digital Europe**, for the years 2021 to 2027. Today, the Council's Permanent Representatives Committee confirmed the common understanding reached by the Romanian presidency and the European Parliament on the proposal, which aims to promote the large-scale roll-out and uptake of key digital technologies such as artificial intelligence applications and state-of-the-art cybersecurity tools.

The common understanding excludes budget-related and horizontal issues which are being discussed as part of the negotiations on the EU's next multiannual financial framework (MFF) covering the period 2021 to 2027.

Digital Europe will help European businesses, especially smaller ones, benefit from the vast opportunities of digital transformation, scale up and gain a competitive edge. At the same time, it will have a significant impact on bridging the digital divide so that everybody has the skills and knowledge to participate fully in a digitised society. The programme will also foster greater professionalism taking into account gender balance, especially with regard to high performance and cloud computing, big data analytics and cybersecurity.

Alexandru Petrescu, Minister for Communications and Information Society of Romania, President of the Council

The Digital Europe programme will provide funding for projects in five crucial areas: **supercomputing, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, advanced digital skills**, and ensuring **wide use of digital technologies** across the economy and society.

Funding for projects to build up high-performance computing will benefit areas such as healthcare, environment and security. Support for spreading the use of artificial intelligence will include, for example, better access to AI testing facilities.

The programme will support advanced digital skills training for the workforce and students, as well as for small and medium-sized enterprises and public administrations. The provision of financing will help ensure that people have easy, trusted and seamless access to digital public services, for instance by enhancing the EU-wide interoperability of public services.

A network of **European Digital Innovation Hubs** will provide access to technological expertise for businesses – in particular SMEs – and public

administrations. These hubs will bring together industry, businesses and administrations in need of new technological solutions on the one hand, and companies that have market-ready solutions, on the other. With a broad geographical coverage across Europe, the hubs will play a central role in the implementation of the programme.

Digital Europe will be complementary to a number of other programmes supporting digital transformation, such as Horizon Europe and the digital aspects of the Connecting Europe Facility.

Next steps

The Council expects the negotiations with the next European Parliament to start as soon as possible, with a view to being finalised on the basis of the progress achieved as reflected in the common understanding. Negotiations will also need to take into account the overall agreement on the multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027.

[Vice-President Katainen: College read-out and remarks on EU-China – a strategic outlook](#)

Good afternoon to all,

There are a couple of issues that we dealt with in the college.

Ahead of the spring European Council in March, the College discussed the progress achieved in building the single market for capital, including with regard to sustainable finance and calls on leaders to keep up the political engagement to lay down the foundation of the Capital Markets Union. On this, a progress report will be presented by Vice-President Dombrovskis in the press room on Friday.

Today, the College has also decided to register a European Citizens' Initiative entitled 'Housing for All'. Without analyzing the substance of the proposal, the Commission has found that it is legally admissible. The purpose of the initiative is to ensure that the right legal conditions exist to facilitate access to housing for everyone in Europe. The registration itself will take place on 18 March this year. After that, organisers will have one year to collect the necessary signatures.

The College was also updated on political developments, including the latest on Article 50 negotiations. President Juncker agreed last night with Prime Minister May on a set of legal assurances and meaningful clarifications to the Withdrawal Agreement and the nature of the backstop, in particular. These

assurances complement the Withdrawal Agreement without re-opening it. They are legally binding. President Juncker recommended to president Tusk that the European Council endorses this document at the European Council of 21 and 22 March subject to a prior positive vote in the House of Commons on the Withdrawal Agreement.

Let's move now to the Communication on EU-China. We adopted today a Communication providing a strategic outlook on EU-China relations.

The EU and China are, on one hand, strategic partners, but also competitors. As this Communication says, we are strategic partners, we are negotiating partners, we are competitors, but China is also our rival. It offers a different way to organize societal developments.

Our objective should be to engage and cooperate with China in all areas where we have common interests. However, we must also seek more balanced and reciprocal conditions governing our economic relations. And the EU must be able to act resolutely to protect our market economy, our social model and our fundamental values, when they are being challenged. We need a level playing field and no trade acquisitions allowed with subsidies. But yes, indeed, we are all in favour of open and fair competition with Chinese operators.

The Commission has therefore reviewed EU relations with China in five broad areas and is proposing to the European Council 10 concrete actions to better respond to opportunities and challenges we have with this partner:

First, we should engage more strongly with China to promote an effective rules based multilateral order as well as to fight climate change. The EU and China can be effective partners in doing so. We both realize the importance of upholding multilateralism as the best way of finding solutions to global problems. We also both agree on the negative impacts that emissions and pollution have on our planet. We have therefore decided to act resolutely on these fronts, but can and should do more.

Second, we want to deepen our action in support of international peace, security and sustainable development. Building on the positive cooperation with China on the Iran nuclear agreement, we want to work with them for instance on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, the peace processes in Afghanistan, or in addressing the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar. China should, however, accept binding arbitration rulings issued under the UN convention of the Law of the Sea related to its maritime claims in the South China Sea. We also want to cooperate with China and promote high governance standards, sustainability and a level playing field in respect to investments and economic cooperation with third countries, in Asia, Western Balkans or Africa, in particular in the field of infrastructure. We also want to engage more effectively with China on human rights issues.

Third, we need to achieve a more balanced and reciprocal trade and investment relationship with China. With more than €1 billion of trade in goods every day, the EU and China are strategic markets for one another. However, distortions in the Chinese economy, where the state retains a strong

influence, have negative spillover effects in the EU, notably when overcapacity leads to dumping. China's state driven industrial policy and ambition to develop domestic champions is also problematic when it leads to non-reciprocal market openness and an uneven playing field for EU companies. We therefore want China to deliver on its commitment to reform WTO rules, and accept stronger discipline on industrial subsidies and forced technology transfer. We also have a shared interest to conclude our bilateral agreements with China on investment by 2020, and aviation safety or geographical indications in the near future. Finally, we call on the Council and European Parliament to adopt as quickly as possible the international procurement instrument, which will help ensuring more reciprocity with third countries in the field of access to public procurement markets.

Fourth point: The EU must strengthen its competitiveness and ensure a level playing field in Europe. Let me be clear that this is homework the EU needs to do regardless of China and is not directed against China. In order to ensure fair competition, EU state aid rules limit strictly subsidies that Member States can grant to private companies. However, they do not apply to foreign subsidies. And WTO rules on subsidies are less stringent than EU state aid rules. This is why we want to reform and strengthen WTO rules on subsidies. But we also need to be able to act on our domestic market. The Commission will therefore identify before the end of 2019 how to more effectively address the distortive effects of foreign state ownership and state financing in Europe and fill the gap in EU law. In order to promote high standards of quality, security, sustainability, and social responsibility, the Commission will also publish a guidance on the participation of foreign bidders in EU's procurement market and conduct an overview of EU's procurement framework. Based on the renewed EU industrial policy strategy, the EU will encourage the development of strategic value chains and key technologies in Europe, such as we do with the action plan on Artificial Intelligence. Finally, we encourage co-legislators to swiftly agree on Horizon Europe programme, which will support innovation in Europe, while also including clear rules on exploitation of results and reciprocal access to R&D funding when we cooperate with third countries. We want to avoid ending up in a situation where we are forced to compete with public subsidies. We believe in social market economy and we are not in favour of a subsidised economy.

The fifth and final point is that we must strengthen the security of EU's critical infrastructure and technology. 5G networks will provide the future backbone of our societies and economies, connecting billions of objects and systems, including sensitive information. The Commission will therefore adopt after the European Council a recommendation for a common EU approach to 5G security networks. We also call Member States to start preparing for the implementation of the new EU foreign investment screening system that will enter into force in April 2019 and will allow detecting and addressing risks to security that may be posed by foreign takeovers of critical assets, technologies and infrastructure. Finally, we call on the Council to swiftly adopt the EU modernized rules on export control of dual use goods. All these steps will reinforce EU resilience and security regarding potential risks in critical sectors.

In conclusion, I want to say that Europe and China are very important partners. Strategic ones, indeed. The EU must deepen its partnership and cooperation with China, for the benefit of both of us. But the EU must also more assertively promote reciprocity in our trade and investment relations, foster a level playing field, and protect our economic, social and political models.

Thank you very much.

Remarks by Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis at the ECOFIN press conference

Thank you, Minister.

And thanks for delivering on important tax files today.

The Commission welcomes the agreement on an updated list of non-cooperative tax jurisdictions. This list was first agreed by Member States in December 2017. It has become an important tool to tackle risks of tax abuse and unfair tax competition globally.

This works because the EU is speaking with one voice to its international partners to address concerns in the field of taxation. And this process delivers results: so far, 60 countries have taken action on the Commission's concerns and over 100 harmful regimes have been eliminated.

Based on the Commission's screening, ministers blacklisted today 15 countries:

- Of those 15 countries, 5 have taken no commitments since the first blacklist adopted in 2017: American Samoa, Guam, Samoa, Trinidad and Tobago, and US Virgin Islands.
- 3 other countries were on the 2017 list, but were moved to the grey list following commitments they had taken. But the commitments have not been followed. So we are blacklisting those countries again: Barbados, Marshall Islands and United Arab Emirates.
- A further 7 countries were moved today from the grey list to the blacklist for the same reason: Aruba, Belize, Bermuda, Dominica, Fiji, Oman and Vanuatu.

There is still a grey list with 34 countries, which will continue to be monitored in 2019.

To conclude, the list is a valuable policy tool, because it impacts and

changes global tax practices for the better. This is why I would like to thank all Ministers for their support for this exercise.

Ministers also discussed the taxation of the digital economy, also taking into account the latest international developments. And once again, an agreement was not possible, which the Commission regrets.

Our concern is that this will lead to the fragmentation of the single market, as several countries have taken steps to table digital tax legislation at national level. The Commission will continue to take active part in the global conversation on this matter. We also hope for EU countries to speak with one voice in international fora. This is important, because our economy is becoming increasingly digital and thus our tax systems – increasingly outdated.

In this context I welcome the agreement on new rules to simplify the VAT collection on online sales. Coming into force as of January 2021, these new measures should help Member States to recover some EUR 5 billion in lost tax revenues in this sector each year. This figure is increasing and is expected to rise to EUR 7 billion by 2020.

On the financial services side, I would like to thank Ministers for their constant support for the Capital Markets Union files.

Several important deals have been reached in the past couple of weeks. We have now agreed 9 out of 13 CMU proposals, plus 2 proposals on sustainable finance.

This shows that our political will has been turned into deeds. And this Friday I will be in the Commission press room to give a detailed update on the Capital Markets Union project and once again I would like to thank the Presidency for their dedicated push in this area.

Let me also mention that we presented Ministers with our Winter European Semester package – country reports and conclusions of our in-depth macroeconomic analysis for 13 countries. The reports give detailed assessment of economic and social challenges in each Member State. This is a first step in our dialogue with Member States, which are now preparing their national reform programmes.

Throughout the mandate this Commission has fostered national ownership of reforms. This is what this process is really about. Because ownership is what counts when it comes to delivering these reforms.

Last but not least, Finnish Finance Minister Petteri Orpo presented the initiative by Chile and Finland to create a Finance Minister Coalition for Climate Change. We warmly welcome this initiative, and I see it as complementary to our efforts. Because to deliver on the Paris Climate Agreement, we need massive investment efforts in green and sustainable projects. This implies scaling up both public and private investment.

When it comes to mobilizing private investment, last night the responsible European Parliament committees voted on our proposal to set up an EU

classification or taxonomy for climate and environmentally-friendly economic activities. This draft law is crucial to unlock investment in green projects, because it creates common definitions for what is actually green. Without this clarity, without this EU classification system, we are a bit stuck.

We need a taxonomy to offer trustworthy green financial products to institutional and retail investors alike, and the demand for that kind of products is growing very rapidly.

This is why I call on Member States to agree on the general approach on taxonomy as soon as possible, to bring also preparedness on the Council side. Because every day lost is time lost in the fight against climate change.

Thank you.

European Citizens' Initiative: Commission registers 'Housing for All' initiative

The objective of the initiative is *"to bring about better legal and financial framework conditions to facilitate access to housing for everyone in Europe"*. The organisers call on the European Commission to ensure *"easier access for all to social and affordable housing, not applying the Maastricht criteria to public investment in social and affordable housing, better access to EU funding for non-profit and sustainable housing developers, social, competition-based rules for short-term rentals and the compilation of statistics on housing needs in Europe."*

Under the Treaties, the EU can take legal action in this area, for example when it comes to internal market rules as well as strengthening economic, social and territorial cohesion in Europe. The European Commission has therefore decided to register the Initiative. The Commission's decision concerns only the legal admissibility of the proposal. The Commission has not yet analysed the substance.

The registration of this Initiative will take place on 18 March 2019, starting a one-year process of collection of signatures of support by its organisers. Should the Initiative receive one million statements of support within one year, from at least seven different Member States, the European Commission will have to react within three months. The Commission can decide either to follow the request or not, and in both instances would be required to explain its reasoning.

Background

European Citizens' Initiatives were introduced with the Lisbon Treaty and launched as an agenda-setting tool in the hands of citizens in April 2012, upon the entry into force of the European Citizens' Initiative Regulation which implements the Treaty provisions. In 2017, as part of President Juncker's State of the Union address, the European Commission tabled [reform proposals for the European Citizens' Initiative](#) to make it even more user-friendly. In [December 2018](#), the European Parliament and the Council reached a political agreement on the reform, paving the way for application of the revised rules as of 1 January 2020.

Once formally registered, a European Citizens' Initiative allows one million citizens from at least one quarter of EU Member States to invite the European Commission to propose a legal act in areas where the Commission has the power to do so.

The conditions for admissibility are that the proposed action does not manifestly fall outside the framework of the Commission's powers to submit a proposal for a legal act, that it is not manifestly abusive, frivolous or vexatious and that it is not manifestly contrary to the values of the Union.

For More Information

Full text of the proposed European Citizens' Initiative (available as of 18 March)

[ECIs currently collecting signatures](#)

[ECI website](#)

[ECI Regulation](#)

[Housing for All Initiative](#) – website

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COLLEGE MEETING: Commission reviews relations with China, proposes 10 actions

Against the backdrop of China's growing economic power and political influence, the European Commission and the High Representative review European Union-China relations and the related opportunities and challenges. With today's Joint Communication on ["EU-China – A strategic outlook"](#), the European Commission and the High Representative aim to start a discussion to refine Europe's approach to be more realistic, assertive and multi-faceted. In particular, they are setting out 10 concrete actions for EU Heads of State or Government to discuss and endorse at the European Council of 21 March. These actions are formulated in the context of relations with China, but some of them relate to the EU's global competitiveness and security. Vice-

President, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica **Mogherini**, said: *“China is a Strategic Partner of the European Union. We pursue strong bilateral and multilateral cooperation on files where we share interests, from trade to connectivity, from the JCPOA to climate change. And we are willing to keep engaging robustly where our policies differ or compete. This is the aim of the 10 actions that we are proposing to strengthen our relations with China, in a spirit of mutual respect.”* Vice-President Jyrki **Katainen**, responsible for jobs, growth, investment and competitiveness, said: *“EU and China are strategic economic partners as well as competitors. Our economic relationship can be hugely mutually beneficial if competition is fair and trade and investment relations are reciprocal. With this Communication we make concrete proposals on how the EU can act to strengthen its competitiveness, ensure more reciprocity and level playing field, and protect its market economy from possible distortions.”* In general, the EU’s response should pursue three objectives: First, based on clearly defined interests and principles, the EU should deepen its engagement with China to promote common interests at global level. Then, the EU should robustly seek more balanced and reciprocal conditions governing the economic relationship. Finally, in order to maintain its prosperity, values and social model over the long term, there are areas where the EU itself needs to adapt to changing economic realities and strengthen its own domestic policies and industrial base. More information is available in [this press release](#). A factsheet on EU-China relations is also available [online](#). (For more information: Annika Breidthardt – Tel.: +32 229-56153; Maja Kocijancic – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Sophie Dupin de Saint-Cyr – Tél .: +32 229 56169; Adam Kaznowski – Tel: +32 229 89359)

RÉUNION DU COLLÈGE: la Commission européenne enregistre l’initiative citoyenne européenne « Housing for All »

La Commission européenne a décidé aujourd’hui d’enregistrer une initiative citoyenne européenne intitulée « Housing for all ». L’objectif de cette initiative est d’« améliorer les conditions-cadres juridiques et financières facilitant l’accès au logement pour tous en Europe ». Les organisateurs demandent à la Commission européenne «un accès facilité pour tous à des logements sociaux et à des logements abordables, la non-prise en compte des investissements publics dans les logements sociaux et les logements abordables dans les critères de Maastricht, un meilleur accès aux fonds de l’Union en faveur des promoteurs de logements durables et sans but lucratif, l’instauration de règles sociales fondées sur la concurrence pour les locations de courte durée et l’établissement de statistiques sur les besoins de logement en Europe. » En vertu des traités, l’UE peut adopter des actes juridiques dans ce domaine, par exemple lorsque cela concerne les règles du marché intérieur et le renforcement de la cohésion économique, sociale et territoriale en Europe. La Commission a dès lors considéré l’initiative comme recevable sur le plan juridique et décidé de l’enregistrer. À ce stade du processus, la Commission n’en analyse pas le fond. L’enregistrement de cette initiative aura lieu le 18 mars 2019 et marquera le début d’un processus de douze mois au cours duquel les signatures de soutien seront collectées par

ses organisateurs. Si, en l'espace d'un an, l'initiative recueille un million de déclarations de soutien, provenant d'au moins sept États membres différents, la Commission procédera à son analyse et disposera d'un délai de trois mois pour réagir. Le communiqué de presse est disponible [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Mina Andreeva – Tél.: +32 229-91382; Andreeva Stankova – Tél.: +32 229 57857)

Fair Taxation: EU updates list of non-cooperative tax jurisdictions

EU Finance Ministers have updated the EU list of non-cooperative tax jurisdictions, based on an intense process of analysis and dialogue steered by the Commission. The list has proven a true success with many countries having changed their laws and tax systems to comply with international standards. Over the course of last year, the Commission assessed 92 countries based on three criteria: tax transparency, good governance and real economic activity, as well as one indicator, the existence of a zero corporate tax rate. Today's update shows that this clear, transparent and credible process delivered a real change: 60 countries took action on the Commission's concerns and over 100 harmful regimes were eliminated. The list has also had a positive influence on internationally agreed tax good governance standards. Based on the Commission's screening, ministers blacklisted today 15 countries. Of those, 5 have taken no commitments since the [first blacklist adopted in 2017](#): American Samoa, Guam, Samoa, Trinidad and Tobago, and US Virgin Islands. 10 countries were moved today from the grey list to the blacklist following commitments they had taken but not having followed up: Aruba, Barbados, Belize, Bermuda, Fiji, Marshall Islands, Oman, United Arab Emirates, Vanuatu and Dominica. Another 34 countries will continue to be monitored in 2019 (grey list), while 25 countries from the original screening process have now been cleared. "The EU tax havens list is a true European success. It has had a resounding effect on tax transparency and fairness worldwide", said Pierre **Moscovici**, Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs. "Thanks to the listing process, dozens of countries have abolished harmful tax regimes and have come into line with international standards on transparency and fair taxation. The countries that did not comply have been blacklisted, and will have to face the consequences that this brings. We are raising the bar of tax good governance globally and cutting out the opportunities for tax abuse." Find a [press release](#) and a [Q&A](#) online. (For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: + 32 229 58615; Patrick McCullough – Tel.: +32 229 87183)

La Commission européenne se félicite de l'accord provisoire visant à mieux protéger les lanceurs d'alerte dans toute l'UE

Aujourd'hui, le Parlement européen et les États membres sont parvenus à un accord provisoire sur de nouvelles règles qui garantiront un niveau élevé de protection aux lanceurs d'alerte signalant des infractions au droit de l'Union. Ces nouvelles règles, qui fixent des normes de protection à l'échelle de l'Union pour les lanceurs d'alerte, ont été proposées pour la première fois par la Commission européenne en avril 2018. Frans **Timmermans**, Premier vice-président, a déclaré: « Nous devons protéger les lanceurs

d'alerte contre le risque d'être sanctionné, licencié, rétrogradé ou poursuivi en justice pour avoir fait ce qui est juste pour la société. C'est précisément la finalité de ces nouvelles règles de protection des lanceurs d'alerte à l'échelle de l'UE, qui garantissent que ces derniers puissent signaler en toute sécurité les infractions au droit de l'UE dans de nombreux domaines. Ces règles contribueront ainsi à la lutte contre la fraude, la corruption, l'évasion fiscale des entreprises et les atteintes à la santé publique et à l'environnement. Nous encourageons les États membres à mettre en place des cadres globaux pour la protection des lanceurs d'alerte qui soient fondés sur les mêmes principes. » Věra Jourová, commissaire pour la justice, les consommateurs et l'égalité des genres, a ajouté pour sa part: « Les scandales « Diesegate » et « Panama Papers » et les révélations dans l'affaire « Cambridge Analytica » nous ont fait comprendre à quel point les lanceurs d'alerte aident à mettre au jour des activités illicites qui portent atteinte à la fois à l'intérêt public et à notre bien-être général. Nous devons soutenir et protéger les personnes courageuses qui mettent en lumière des activités illégales. Je suis heureuse que nous soyons parvenus à un système équilibré qui encourage les employeurs à résoudre les problèmes au niveau interne tout en permettant aux lanceurs d'alerte de se tourner vers les pouvoirs publics sans crainte de représailles. » Les nouvelles règles couvrent un large éventail de domaines du droit de l'Union, notamment la lutte contre le blanchiment de capitaux et la fiscalité des entreprises, la protection des données, la protection des intérêts financiers de l'Union, la sécurité des denrées alimentaires et des produits, la protection de l'environnement et la sûreté nucléaire. Le communiqué de presse est disponible [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Christian Wigand – Tél.: +32 229 62253; Mélanie Voin – Tél.: +32 229 5865)

Commission welcomes agreement on new rules paving the way for better VAT collection on online sales

The Commission has welcomed the agreement reached by EU Member States on detailed measures needed to simplify VAT rules for sales of goods online, also ensuring that online marketplaces play their part in the fight against tax fraud. The new rules agreed today will ensure a smooth introduction of the new VAT measures for e-commerce [agreed in December 2017](#) and which will come into force in January 2021. They should also help Member States to recover the €5 billion in tax revenues lost in the sector each year – a figure due to rise to €7 billion by 2020. EU Economic and Financial Affairs ministers took the decision at their meeting in Brussels this morning. Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs Union, Pierre **Moscovici**, said: “Step by step we are plugging the gaps through which tax revenues are lost, depriving EU countries of funds that could be used for public services and investment. At the same time we are bringing VAT rules into the 21st century, adapting them to an increasingly digital and globalised economy. Businesses should look forward to a smooth transition to the broader VAT system for e-commerce in 2021.” Find a press release [online](#). (For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: + 32 229 58615; Patrick McCullough – Tel.: +32 229 87183)

Capital Markets Union: Commission welcomes progress on the proposal for an EU classification system for sustainable economic activities

The Commission welcomes the vote by the European Parliament's Economic affairs (ECON) and Environment Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) Joint Committee on a EU classification system for sustainable economic activities ('taxonomy'), [proposed by the Commission](#) in May 2018 as part of the [Sustainable Finance Action Plan](#). This is another step towards enabling the financial sector to support the transition towards a climate-neutral economy. The development of an EU-wide taxonomy for environmentally sustainable economic activities is an integral part of the EU efforts, under the [EU's sustainable development agenda](#) and the [carbon neutrality agenda](#), to connect finance with needs of the real economy and drive forward the Capital Markets Union. Valdis **Dombrovskis**, Vice-President responsible for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, said: *"I welcome the European Parliament's committees' vote on the law establishing an EU classification for climate and environmentally friendly economic activities. To invest in projects with a positive impact on the planet, investors first need to know what is green. The lack of clarity makes us lose precious time in the fight against climate change. This is why I urge Member States to agree on a general approach as soon as possible."* Vice-President Jyrki **Katainen**, responsible for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness, added: *"With this vote, the EU taxonomy project has received much-needed political backing. This sends a strong signal globally about the determination of the EU to enable the transition to a climate-neutral and circular economy, supported by private capital. Given the urgency and importance of this project, I hope that both co-legislators will reach a deal before the end of this year."* This proposal would provide market participants and investors with a common understanding of what is unambiguously green and thus fight greenwashing. This will bring clarity on which activities are considered sustainable so that economic actors and investors take more informed decisions, and should facilitate intra-EU sustainable investments. The Commission invites the Council of the European Union to reach an agreement on the proposed rules shortly so that trilogue negotiations with the European Parliament could start. More information available [here](#). (For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: + 32 229 58615; Letizia Lupini – Tel.: +32 229 51958)

European Commission paves the way for safe, secure and green drone operations

The Commission today adopted common EU-wide rules setting technical requirements for drones. They will set features and capabilities that drones must have in order to be flown safely and, at the same time, help foster investment and innovation in this promising sector. The new rules build on national rules that were in place and now provide a harmonised framework across the European Union. Commissioner for Transport, Violeta **Bulc** said: *"Today's decision is vital for the further development of the European drone sector. We wholeheartedly support the development of these new technologies and services, which are essential for the digitalisation and decarbonisation of the European economy. However, above all, we have to ensure that they are safe for other airspace users and people on the ground. The rules adopted*

today are a first building block for a comprehensive set of rules, which will ensure safe, secure and green drone operations throughout the European Union." The approach taken by the Commission, with the support of the European Union Aviation Safety Agency, is to apply the highest safety standards achieved in manned aviation to drones as well. The rules are based on an assessment of the risk of operation, and strike a balance between the obligations of drone manufacturers and operators in terms of safety, respect for privacy, the environment, protection against noise, and security. For example, new drones will have to be individually identifiable, allowing the authorities to trace a particular drone if necessary. In addition to the technical requirements for drones adopted today, the Commission intends to adopt provisions covering the operation of drones. The rules will cover each operation type, from those not requiring prior permission, to those involving certified aircraft and operators, as well as minimum remote pilot training requirements. Today's adoption contributes to a major deliverable under the [Commission's Aviation Strategy for Europe](#) whose core objective is to support the competitiveness of the EU's Aviation Industry and reinforce its global leadership. Please find more information [here](#). (For more information: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: +32 2 295 61 72; Stephan Meder – Tel.: +32 229 13917)

Équité dans la chaîne d'approvisionnement alimentaire: la Commission se félicite du soutien du Parlement pour interdire les pratiques commerciales déloyales

Le Parlement européen a voté aujourd'hui de nouvelles règles européennes qui garantiront la protection de 100% des agriculteurs européens ainsi que des fournisseurs de petite et moyenne taille contre les pratiques commerciales déloyales dans la chaîne d'approvisionnement alimentaire. Après le vote d'aujourd'hui en plénière à Strasbourg, Phil **Hogan**, Commissaire à l'agriculture, a déclaré: « La question de l'équité pour les agriculteurs de la chaîne d'approvisionnement alimentaire est au cœur du vote d'aujourd'hui. La Commission a présenté cette proposition en avril 2018 afin de garantir que les agriculteurs soient traités équitablement par tous les acteurs de la chaîne d'approvisionnement alimentaire et afin d'assurer cette protection minimale dans l'ensemble de l'UE. Cette loi était l'une des propositions clés du groupe de travail sur les marchés agricoles. Le vote d'aujourd'hui témoigne de notre capacité à apporter des réponses concrètes aux citoyens européens. » La nouvelle législation européenne couvre les produits agricoles et les denrées alimentaires commercialisés dans le cadre de la chaîne d'approvisionnement alimentaire et interdit pour la première fois jusqu'à 16 pratiques commerciales déloyales imposées de manière unilatérale par un partenaire commercial, quel qu'il soit (détaillants, transformateurs de denrées alimentaires, grossistes, coopératives, organisations de producteurs, producteur isolé). Les États membres devront désigner des autorités chargées de l'application des nouvelles règles, y compris d'imposer des amendes et d'ouvrir des enquêtes à la suite de plaintes. Un [communiqué de presse](#) est en ligne, ainsi qu'une brochure explicative en [français](#) et en [anglais](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Daniel Rosario – Tél: +32 2 29 56185; Clémence Robin – Tél: +32 229 52 509)

European Parliament adopts EU Cybersecurity Act to reinforce cybersecurity in the EU

Today, the European Parliament adopted the [Cyber Security Act](#), which European Commission President Jean-Claude **Juncker** initially proposed in his State of the Union Address in September 2017. The Act will improve the European response to the increasing number of cyber threats by strengthening the role of the [European Agency for Network and Information Security](#) (ENISA) and establishing a common European cybersecurity certification framework for IT services, systems and equipment. In September 2018 the Commission proposed to create a [European network of centres of cybersecurity expertise](#), which will help to reinforce research and deployment of new cybersecurity capacities in the EU. Under the next long-term EU budget, the Commission has proposed more than €2 billion to reinforce cybersecurity in the Digital Europe Programme as well as under HorizonEurope. To lay the ground work for building this network, the Commission is investing more than €63.5 million in [four pilot projects](#). Mariya **Gabriel**, Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, will meet tomorrow in Strasbourg a number of representatives of these projects, which involve more than 160 partners, including large companies, SMEs, universities and cybersecurity research institutes from 26 EU Member States. More information on ENISA is available [online](#). *(For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Joseph Waldstein – Tel.: +32 229 56184)*

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Paul Street East by PSP, Allianz and Greystar

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of Paul Street East of the UK by the Public Sector Pension Investment Board (“PSP”) of Canada, Allianz Real Estate Investments S.A. (“Allianz”) of Germany, and Greystar Real Estate Partners LLC (“Greystar”) of the US. Paul Street East is a student accommodation property located in London, UK. PSP is the pension investment manager of the pension plans of the Canadian Federal Public Service, the Canadian Forces, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Reserved Force. Allianz is part of the Allianz Group, a multinational financial service provider active worldwide in the insurance and asset management business. Greystar develops, acquires and manages rental housing projects and portfolios for itself and on behalf of various institutional, sovereign wealth and private investors. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, because of its limited impact on the market structure. 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. 9260](#). *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)*

Mergers: Commission clears the acquisition of Esterline by TransDigm

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of Esterline Technologies (“Esterline”) by TransDigm Group, both

of the US. Esterline is active in the design, manufacture and marketing of highly engineered products, principally for aerospace and defence customers. TransDigm business includes the design, production and supply of engineered aerospace components, systems and subsystems. Its products are used on both commercial and military aircrafts. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, because there are only minimal horizontal and vertical overlaps between the activities of the companies and, where these activities overlap, sufficient alternatives will remain following the transaction. The transaction was examined under the normal merger review procedure. More information is available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the public [case register](#) under the case number [M.9211](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Eurostat: Plus de 5 millions de naissances dans l'UE en 2017

En 2017, 5,075 millions de bébés sont nés au sein de l'Union européenne (UE), contre 5,148 millions en 2016. L'indicateur conjoncturel de fécondité de l'UE s'établissait à 1,59 naissance par femme en 2017, contre 1,60 en 2016. Depuis le début des séries temporelles comparables, l'indicateur conjoncturel de fécondité le plus élevé a été enregistré en 2010 quand il s'est élevé à 1,62. Ce taux est inférieur au niveau de renouvellement de la population, qui correspond à 2,1 naissances vivantes par femme. Sur les 5,075 millions de naissances, 45% concernaient un premier enfant, 36% un deuxième enfant et 19% un troisième enfant ou un enfant de rang supérieur. En moyenne dans l'UE, les femmes qui ont donné naissance à leur premier enfant en 2017 étaient âgées de 29,1 ans. Sur cinq ans, l'âge moyen est passé progressivement de 28,7 ans en 2013 à 29,1 ans en 2017. Un communiqué de presse est disponible [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Christian Wigand – Tél.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tél.: +32 229 67094)

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