

[Daily News 22 / 03 / 2018](#)

Energy Union: Synchronisation of the Baltic States' electricity network with the European system will strengthen solidarity and regional security of supply

Today, the Heads of State or Government of the Baltic States and of Poland met with President **Juncker** to reaffirm their strong commitment to synchronising the Baltic States' electricity grid with the continental European System by 2025. The Heads of State or Government called for utmost efforts to maintain the working schedule of the Ministers, of system operators and of experts. They agreed to meet again in summer, to conclude a political agreement on the preferred way of synchronising the Baltic States with the continental European network. At a meeting held in the European Commission premises, the President of the European Commission Jean-Claude **Juncker** together with the President of Lithuania Dalia Grybauskaitė, the Prime Minister of Estonia Jüri Ratas, the Prime Minister of Latvia Māris Kučinskis and the Prime Minister of Poland Mateusz Morawiecki stressed the importance of the synchronisation process as a key element to physically integrate the Baltic States with the Continental European energy system and offering a major contribution to the unity and energy security of the European Union. They stressed that this is one of the most emblematic projects of the Energy Union and a concrete expression of solidarity in energy security. They agreed that 2018 will be a decisive year and expressed their commitment to conclude by June 2018 a political agreement on the preferred way of synchronising the Baltic States with the continental European network. In order to successfully realise the project the support from Connecting Europe Facility funds will be crucial. Read full statement [here](#). (For more information: Anna-Kaisa Itkonen – Tel.: +32 229 56186; Nicole Bockstaller – Tel.: +32 229 52589)

Sustainable Finance: High-Level Conference kicks EU's strategy for greener and cleaner economy into high gear

The European Commission is today hosting a high-level conference on its strategy to reform the financial system in support of the EU's climate and sustainable development agenda. This event is an opportunity to maintain the momentum established at the [One Planet Summit](#), cementing the support and commitment of EU leaders and key private players for the changes needed in the financial system and the economy. The event is jointly hosted in Brussels by Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and Vice-President Valdis **Dombrovskis**. Jean-Claude **Juncker**, President of the European Commission said: *"Europe is open for sustainable business. But climate change knows no boundaries and will affect us all. We cannot work alone. This is why we want to lead international efforts and will work with our G7, G20 and United Nations partners to set global sustainable finance standards [...] Two decades ago, sustainability was a specialist topic for experts and scientists. Today, it is a daily reality and a priority for governments, for financial*

institutions, for business and for citizens [...]. At its heart it is about making sure that our money works for our planet as well as our bottom line. There is no greater return on investment.” The full speech is available [here](#). High-level keynote speakers include French President Emmanuel Macron and Michael Bloomberg, the United Nations Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for Climate Action. European Commission Vice-President Jyrki **Katainen**, Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy Miguel **Arias Cañete** and Commissioner for Environment Karmenu **Vella** will also address hundreds of participants discussing how best to put the Commission’s [Action Plan on Sustainable Finance](#) into practice. The Action Plan, launched on March 8, is part of the [Capital Markets Union’s \(CMU\)](#) efforts to connect finance with the specific needs of the European economy to the benefit of the planet and our society. It is also one of the key steps towards implementing the historic [Paris Agreement](#) and the [EU implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#). Link to the live webcast [here](#). A full press release is available [here](#). Speeches are published [here](#). (For more information: Vanessa Mock – Tel.: +32 229 56194; Letizia Lupini – Tel.: +32 229 51958)

Global Report on Food Crises: major famines were partly averted in 2017 but food security remains critical

The [Global Report on Food Crises](#) indicates that major risks of famine were averted in 2017 in the four countries that were declared at risk in early 2017: Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and North Nigeria. However, it also highlights the severity and the complexity of food crises around the world. Neven **Mimica**, Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, who presented the report today in Rome together with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation and the World Food Programme, said: “*In 2017, the Global Report on Food Crises alerted us about the risk of famines in a number of partner countries. Thanks to local and international efforts, including in the most critical hotspots, we were able to avert major famines. But let us be clear: we still have huge challenges ahead of us, and the EU will continue to work relentlessly for food security around the world. When future generations look back on this time in history, I want to say that we were not only able to diagnose the problem, but we were also able to prescribe the right solutions.*” The [Global Report on Food Crises](#) provides a comprehensive picture of the severity and magnitude of acute food insecurity and malnutrition in 51 countries and territories, with in-depth analysis of 26 hotspots. Read the full press release [here](#). (for more information: Carlos Martin Ruiz De Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Christina Wunder – Tel.: +32 229 92256)

Single Market: Commission welcomes agreement on professional services

The Commission welcomes the preliminary political agreement between the European Parliament and the Council on a “proportionality test” to guide Member States in regulating professional services. The Commission tabled the proposal in January 2017 among other [measures to give the EU services economy](#)

[a fresh boost](#), and the agreement comes shortly after the [joint statement](#) by the European Parliament, Commission and Council presidency on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Single Market. Around 50 million people – 22% of the European labour force – work in professions to which access is conditional upon the possession of specific qualifications or for which the use of a specific title is protected, e.g. engineers, lawyers or architects. Regulation can be warranted for a number of professions, for example those linked with health and safety. But there are many cases where unnecessarily burdensome and outdated rules make it unreasonably difficult for qualified candidates to access these jobs. This is also to the detriment of consumers. Under EU law, a Member State needs to establish whether new national professional requirements are necessary and balanced. The Commission proposal does not change existing law but aims to ensure a coherent and consistent approach by streamlining and clarifying how Member States should ensure that national rules on professional services are necessary and balanced. The tentative agreement reached in so-called trilogue negotiations is still subject to formal adoption. *(For more information: Lucía Caudet – Tel.: +32 229 56182; Victoria von Hammerstein – Tel.: +32 229 55040; Maud Noyon – Tel. +32 229 80379)*

Vienna, Igoumenitsa and Turda receive European sustainable urban mobility awards

The European Commission yesterday announced the winners of the 2017 European sustainable urban mobility awards at a ceremony held in Brussels. **Vienna** (Austria) received [the EUROPEANMOBILITYWEEK Award](#) for large municipalities, while **Igoumenitsa** (Greece) won the inaugural prize in the ‘less than 50,000 inhabitants’ category. **Turda** (Romania) received the [Award for Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning](#). With 75% of Europeans living in cities, sustainable urban mobility is essential to the EU’s ambitious climate objectives and to tackle issues such as congestion, noise, and air pollution. The three cities were selected by an independent jury for their innovative solutions to promote sustainability. Commissioner for Transport Violeta **Bulc** said: *“My congratulations to each of the award winners. Through their actions, Vienna, Igoumenitsa and Turda are creating a more sustainable Europe. They also help their residents to move around in a cleaner, healthier and more enjoyable way. It is my hope that these cities will inspire others to embrace the core message of EUROPEANMOBILITYWEEK – sustainable mobility is the right choice for everyone.”* Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Karmenu **Vella** said: *“Mobility Week gets bigger every year! More proof, year after year, that green is everyone’s favourite colour. Green means clean, it means convenient, and it means a city where people find it easy to go about their business. And best of all, it’s better for your health. My congratulations to these winners – they’ve understood what citizens really need.”* 2017 was the most successful edition of EUROPEANMOBILITYWEEK to date, with over 2,500 towns and cities participating. More information on the three winners is available [here](#). *(For more information: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: +32 229 56172; Alexis Perier – Tel.: +32 229 69143)*

EUROSTAT: L'emploi a augmenté dans 8 régions de l'UE sur 10

En 2016, 231 des régions de l'UE (84%) ont vu augmenter leur taux d'emploi. Le nombre de personnes occupées a diminué dans 32 autres régions et est resté stable dans encore 12 autres régions. La croissance de l'emploi a fortement varié d'une région à l'autre de l'UE et au sein d'un même pays. Les taux de croissance de l'emploi les plus élevés ont été enregistrés dans les régions polonaises de Podkarpackie (+7,9%) et d'Opolskie (+5,9%), dans la région espagnole de la Ciudad Autónoma de Melilla (+4,8%) et dans les régions polonaises de Pomorskie et de Warmińsko-Mazurskie (+4,7% chacune). À l'inverse, les plus forts taux de diminution de l'emploi ont été enregistrés dans les régions roumaines de Nord-Est (-3,8%) et de Sud-Vest Oltenia (-3,0%), dans la région polonaise de Wielkopolskie (-2,5%), dans la région bulgare de Severoiztochen (-2,3%) et dans la région polonaise de Śląskie (-2,2%). Dans l'ensemble de l'UE, l'emploi a augmenté de 1,2% en 2016. Un communiqué de presse est disponible [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Mélanie Voin – Tel.: +32 229 58659)

STATEMENTS

Joint statement on the ratification of the Border Demarcation Agreement between Kosovo and Montenegro

Following yesterday's ratification of the Border Demarcation Agreement between Kosovo and Montenegro, High Representative/Vice-President Federica **Mogherini**, Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris **Avramopoulos** and Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes **Hahn** have issued this statement: *"The ratification of the Border Demarcation Agreement with Montenegro, by the Assembly of Kosovo, represents a real achievement, a welcome and concrete progress, very much in the spirit of good neighbourly relations as well as the new Commission [Strategy](#) for the Western Balkans. The ratification is also the fulfilment of one of the key criteria for Kosovo's visa liberalisation. As President Juncker said during his recent visit to Kosovo, it is a crucial step towards visa liberalisation which will first and foremost benefit the people. [...] The European Union expects all sides in Kosovo to continue the hard work and successful efforts to achieve visa-free travel for the people of Kosovo and in the interest of the region."* The full statement is available [online](#). (For more information: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456; Maja Kocijančič – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Tove Ernst – Tel.: +32 229 86764)

Joint Statement by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini, EU Commissioner for Trade Cecilia Malmström and EU Commissioner for Development and International Cooperation Neven Mimica on the launch of the African Continental Free Trade Area

"The historic decision to launch the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) taken on 21 March by the African Union at its Assembly in Kigali, represents a significant step towards deepening continental integration. The

adoption and signing of the AfCFTA legal instruments and the signing of the Protocol on free movement of persons are concrete commitments to liberalisation and to building on what has already been achieved at the regional level. The EU is ready to support the implementation of this impressive achievement in the spirit of the [African Union-European Union partnership](#) and our [joint political declaration](#) of the Summit in Abidjan in November 2017. The meeting between the African Union and the European Commission in Brussels on 23 May will be an important opportunity to discuss this further. We will be focussing on delivering on our joint commitments as agreed in Abidjan, to advance the strategic priorities for our cooperation for the coming years.” The statement is available [here](#). (for more information: Catherine Ray – Tel.: +32 229 69921; Enrico Brivio – Tel.: +32 229 56172; Carlos Martin Ruiz De Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Commissioner Gabriel in Croatia to discuss Digital Single Market and audiovisual sector

Commissioner **Gabriel** visits Zagreb, Croatia tomorrow to discuss the latest developments in the [MEDIA](#) sub-programme of Creative Europe and in the [Digital Single Market](#). In the morning, the Commissioner will give a keynote speech and preside a panel discussion at the event “[10th Anniversary of the Creative Europe in Croatia – Strong Women of European Audiovisual Industry in Zagreb for the First Time!](#)”. The Commissioner will address the contributions of the MEDIA programme to the Croatian film industry. As well, Commissioner Gabriel will discuss the question of gender balance in the European audiovisual sector; underlining the initiatives she launched two weeks ago to increase the participation of [women in the digital and audiovisual sectors](#). Following this panel, Commissioner Gabriel will join the 9th Plenary meeting of European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services (ERGA) to discuss the ongoing negotiations on the Commission’s proposals to modernise the EU copyright rules, the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, the situation of the European audiovisual industry, and the opportunities for the sector during the [European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018](#). At 15:00 CET, the Commissioner will hold a Citizens’ Dialogue at the University of Zagreb together with Croatian MEP Dubravka Šuica, to exchange with all the participants on the latest initiatives launched by the Commission for the completion of the Digital Single Market. The Commissioner can be followed on her Twitter account [@GabrielMariya](#). (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 56172; Inga Höglund Tel.: +32 229 55040)

Commissioner Navracsics in Sofia to open the EU Sport Forum

Today, Commissioner Tibor **Navracsics**, in charge of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports, is in Sofia to open the [EU Sport Forum](#) taking place [on 22-23 March](#) under the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Under the banner ‘Sport in Europe, investing for future generations,’ this year’s edition will have a special focus on the role of sport in international relations. The Commissioner will also present the results of

the latest Eurobarometer on physical activity showing that the number of EU citizens who never exercise or play sport has slightly increased from 42% to 46% since 2009. Ahead of the event, Commissioner **Navracsics** said: *“The new figures show how vitally important it is to continue our efforts to promote physical activity and healthy lifestyles. I strongly encourage all actors, from public authorities to sports organisations, to intensify their efforts and work together.”* The European Commission is working to boost physical activity, for example through the [European Week of Sport](#), as well as through projects funded by the [Erasmus+ programme](#). In September last year, Commissioners Tibor **Navracsics**, Phil **Hogan**, responsible for Agriculture and Rural development, and Vytenis **Andriukaitis**, in charge of Health and Food safety, launched an initiative which sets out a roadmap for promoting healthy lifestyles in Europe, particular amongst children. The Commissioner’s opening speech is available [online](#). Detailed results of the Eurobarometer are published [here](#) and [here](#). (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Joseph Waldstein – Tel.: +32 229 56184)

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

[The Tories’ benefit cap is particularly punitive and shockingly arbitrary](#)

This week I am joining my SNP colleagues in highlighting some of the most appalling cuts we have seen under this Tory Government – many of which were introduced by the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016.

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[News story: Royal Navy prepares for future UK fishery patrols](#)

HMS Forth is the first of five state-of-the-art Royal Navy vessels designed for fishery protection, as well as counter-piracy, anti-smuggling, border patrol, counter terrorism and maritime defence duties.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

The Royal Navy has a proud tradition of protecting the UK's coastline and keeping a close eye on our fishing waters. With these state-of-the-art, vastly capable ships we stand ready to protect our fisheries once Britain leaves the EU.

The River-class Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPV) 'production line' is moving apace with the £116 million ships emerging at around six month intervals. The Royal Navy Fishery Protection Squadron are expecting a further two ships – HMS Medway and Trent – to be handed over later this year, with the remaining two – HMS Tamar and Spey – expected to arrive in Portsmouth by 2020. Just last week HMS Trent was formally named at the Glasgow shipyard where was built.

They will become the Royal Navy's eyes and ears around the UK, helping to safeguard fishing stocks. They will also assist in reassuring and protecting the Falkland Islands and are capable of deploying to the Mediterranean and Caribbean to uphold UK interests around the world.

Last week the Treasury announced that the MOD will receive £12.7 million from the Government's Brexit preparation allocation to support work with DEFRA on maintaining the UK's fisheries. The MOD is working closely with other government departments like DEFRA to determine the optimum deployment of these extremely flexible vessels.

With a total crew of around 58, but designed to go to sea with 39, they can spend up to 320 days a year on operational taskings. The larger crew allows a rotation of personnel to ensure they get to spend time at home or on training.

The new OPVs are four knots faster than their predecessors at 24 knots, have an increased range of 5,500 nautical miles, have a 30mm automatic cannon as their main armament instead of a 20mm gun, two Miniguns, four machine-guns and are equipped with two Pacific 24 sea boats. Each ship has an extended flight deck to operate up to Merlin size helicopters and accommodation for up to 50 embarked Royal Marines for boarding and supporting operations ashore if required.

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[Trawler suspected of operating](#)

illegally intercepted in joint operation (with photo)

A trawler suspected of operating illegally was intercepted in an anti-illegal fishing operation jointly mounted by the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) and the Marine Police in the northern waters of Hong Kong last night (March 21).

At about 7.45pm last night, AFCD officers and the Marine Police patrolling the waters northeast of Shek Ngau Chau found a fishing vessel suspected to be trawling there. They signaled the vessel to stop for an inspection. About 2 kilograms of catch and some gear used for trawling, including a “framed trawl net”, were seized on board the vessel.

Charges were laid today (March 22) against seven Mainland men found on the vessel, which was suspected to have contravened the Fisheries Protection Regulations by using prohibited fishing gear. They will appear at the Fanling Magistrates’ Courts tomorrow (March 23).

An AFCD spokesman reminded the public that the ban on trawling came into force on December 31, 2012. Any person who contravenes the ban upon conviction is liable to a maximum penalty of a fine of \$200,000 and imprisonment for six months under the Fisheries Protection Ordinance.

The spokesman said that trawling is a non-selective fishing operation which damages the seabed and marine ecosystems. A ban on trawling brings this harmful depletion to an immediate halt, enabling marine ecosystems to be gradually rehabilitated to a sustainable level and be better conserved in the long run.

The spokesman said, “The AFCD and the Police will continue to carry out joint enforcement operations to crack down on illegal fishing activities.”

