

News story: Britain set to launch Combat Air Strategy, Defence Secretary announces

The MOD will work across Government and closely with industry and international partners to explore the UK's future Combat Air capabilities, building on the Industrial Strategy and refreshed Defence Industrial Policy launched last year.

The strategy will examine the operational capability needed in the future and the skills and resource required to deliver it. The work will take new and emerging technology into account, as well as export potential, whilst testing British industry's ability to deliver our future requirements. It is expected to be launched in the summer.

Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Since the birth of airpower, British industry has been crucial to maintaining our military's world-leading position. As we celebrate 100 years of the RAF protecting our skies, it is fitting that we create bold and ambitious plans to help our brave Armed Forces keep us safe in the face of intensifying threats. The Combat Air Strategy will bring together the best of British engineering, skill and design, and deliver a compelling vision for the future of air power.

Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Hillier, said:

It is especially fitting that we launch the Combat Air Strategy as our Royal Air Force marks its 100th anniversary. Combat Air capabilities have been at the heart of the RAF's capabilities throughout its history, and are constantly employed on operations across the world today.

This strategy will ensure that the RAF can continue to remain at the forefront of the high-end airpower technology and innovation we need to deal with future threats, working in close collaboration with UK industry and our international partners.

The UK is already a world-leader in the air sector which accounts for 85% of the Britain's defence export orders. The industry is made up of close to 2,500 companies, generating more than £33.5bn in turnover and employing more than 128,000 people – some 26,000 of them in highly skilled research, design and engineering jobs.

Investment in combat air technology combined with the strengths of UK industry has resulted in the UK being the US' only Tier 1 partner on the F-35 Lightning II programme, with British industry building around 15% of every F-35 which is built. The UK has been able to exploit the operational capabilities of the aircraft, while reinforcing UK industrial capability, skills and wider economic prosperity.

The UK also continues to lead the way in combat air power as one of the four partner nations in the Eurofighter Typhoon programme. With more than 20,000 flying hours on global operations to date, the Typhoon has offered unparalleled reliability and proven interoperability with our allies.

The F-35 Lightning II and the Typhoon are two complimentary multi-role combat aircraft that will make up the RAF's combat air fleet, placing the UK at the forefront of fighter jet technology – with the Typhoon expected to remain in UK service until at least 2040.

Just last week the UK led the bid to replace Belgium's fighter jets with 34 Typhoons with the offer to include a comprehensive defence and industrial partnership between the Governments of Belgium and the UK. The Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson was also in Qatar at the end of last year to oversee Qatar's multi-billion pound purchase of 24 Typhoon aircraft, supporting thousands of jobs across the UK.

The announcement of the strategy comes after an initial review of the defence aerospace sector by the MOD, which involved engaging across Government and with industry. The development of a Combat Air Strategy is consistent with the themes of the Modernising Defence Programme. It will set out in practical terms how the MOD can deliver its critical military capability requirements whilst considering wider economic and international factors, and our national security objectives.

[News story: Britain set to launch Combat Air Strategy, Defence Secretary announces](#)

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[Funding of European political parties: Council ready to launch talks with Parliament](#)

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On 21 February 2018, EU ambassadors agreed the Council's position on revised rules for the funding of European political parties and foundations. This enables the Bulgarian presidency to begin negotiations with the European Parliament.

The changes target certain abusive practices, such as the creation of artificial entities to receive funds from the EU budget. The amended rules will ensure a fairer allocation of resources and allow for stronger enforcement in case of fraud.

"This is a timely proposal, which will help make sure that EU taxpayers' money is used for its intended purpose," said Monika Payanotova, Deputy Minister for the Bulgarian Presidency of the EU Council. "The Council wants to move quickly so that the new rules can be in place before the 2019 EP elections," she added.

Main changes proposed

The Council supports revising the conditions for forming European political parties so that only national parties and no longer individuals can sponsor their creation. The aim is to make sure that such parties have a genuine European dimension, with true representation in at least a quarter of the member states.

The distribution key for the allocation of funds would also change. In its mandate the Council supports sharing 10% of the total budget equally between all European political parties, rather than 15% as is currently the case. This means that a larger share of the funds would be distributed to European political parties in proportion to the number of MEPs they have, reflecting the support they have received in the EP elections. The incentives for creating “mini-clubs” would decrease, while small parties would remain protected.

The Council’s mandate also backs lowering the co-financing requirement for European political parties and foundations (from 15% to 10% and 5%, respectively), recognising their difficulties in meeting the current threshold. The conditions for de-registration are set out in more detail, and natural persons involved in fraud would become liable to pay back misspent funds.

Next steps

The negotiations with the European Parliament on the new rules are expected to begin shortly. The Council and the Parliament aim to have them in force before the end of June, when the call for applications for funding in 2019 is due to be published.

Background

European political parties are foreseen in the Treaty on the European Union, which recognises their role in “forming European political awareness and expressing the will of citizens of the Union”.

The rules for their registration and funding are laid down in Regulation No 1141/2014, which covers also European political foundations affiliated with a European political party. The regulation established an Authority for European Political Parties and European Political Foundations, which decides on their registration and checks how they use their funding.

In 2018, 12 European political parties and 10 European political foundations receive funding from the EU budget.

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Statement by Commissioner Vestager on Commission decision to fine seven companies for participating in four cartels

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The Commission has today fined seven companies a total of 546 million euros for taking part in four different cartels relating to cars. Three other companies involved in these cartels escaped a fine, because they came to us to reveal the cartels. All companies acknowledged their participation in these cartels and agreed to settle the cases.

Maritime car carriers cartel

The first of those cartels was about the transport of new cars, trucks and other large vehicles by sea.

In 2016, almost ten million vehicles were transported between Europe and other continents on specialised large ships – known as roll-on/roll-off ships. That includes nearly three and a half million imported cars, and nearly six and a half million exported cars.

Five of the companies involved in this transport business participated in the cartel – CSAV, “K” Line, MOL, NYK and WWL-EUKOR. Between them, they transported almost half of those ten million vehicles.

For almost six years, between October 2006 and September 2012, sales managers from these companies met at each other’s offices, in bars, restaurants and other social gatherings. They were also in contact over the phone on a regular basis.

In those discussions, the five companies coordinated prices, divided up customers between them and exchanged commercially sensitive information that could help them align their prices. Instead of competing, they gave each other a free hand on certain routes or with certain customers, by deliberately quoting high prices or not quoting at all in tenders by carmakers.

MOL avoided a fine because it revealed the existence of the cartel to the Commission. The other four companies have been fined a total of 395 million euros – all four benefited from a reduction because they cooperated with the Commission.

Spark plugs cartel

The other three cartels that we have dealt with today are the latest in a series of cartels involving a whole range of different car parts. These

latest cartels relate to spark plugs and brakes.

Spark plugs are used to ignite the petrol in a car engine. For more than eleven years, three suppliers of spark plugs – Bosch, Denso and NGK – formed a cartel that involved each company avoiding the others' traditional customers, and keeping the status quo in the spark plug industry.

This cartel was based on two-way contacts between NGK and each of the other two companies involved, where commercially sensitive information was discussed.

But at times, the companies also specifically agreed not to compete for each other's customers. That meant agreeing on the prices that each of them would quote, so they could be sure the existing supplier would offer the best price to a specific customer. It also involved agreeing on the share of supplies to certain customers, and on sticking to the shares that they had in the past.

We have fined Bosch and NGK a total of 76 million euros for taking part in this cartel. Both fines were reduced to reflect the fact that the companies cooperated with the investigation.

Denso, meanwhile, avoided a fine altogether by revealing the cartel to the Commission.

Braking systems cartel

The last of today's decisions is about hydraulic and electronic braking systems. It involves two cartels, one between Bosch, Continental and TRW, and one involving only Bosch and Continental.

The first cartel relates to discussions of general sales conditions from 2007 to 2011. The second is about a specific tender during 2010 and 2011.

In both cases, the suppliers coordinated their behaviour in the market via exchanges of confidential information. Those exchanges, including on pricing elements, happened through bilateral meetings, as well as phone conversations and email exchanges.

Our decision fines Bosch and Continental a total of 75 million euros. Both companies had their fines reduced for their cooperation with the Commission. TRW avoided a fine altogether for disclosing the cartel that it was involved in, and Continental also avoided a fine for disclosing the other cartel.

Conclusion

These decisions are just part of the work we've been doing recently to defend fair competition in the markets for cars and trucks. We've already imposed fines of over six billion euros in ten cases involving the car and truck markets. And we will be active in this area as long as we keep finding companies that hope to make higher profits by colluding instead of competing.

Today's decisions are unrelated to our investigation regarding concerns that several German carmakers might have broken EU competition rules. That

investigation is still ongoing.

Today's cases are about collusion at the expense of car makers. But in the end, any extra costs these car makers may have incurred could potentially be passed on to final consumers when they buy a car. So our work today will help to make sure that those markets work fairly for consumers.

Car manufacturing is also a major European industry, one that supports a large number of jobs across Europe.

In 2016 alone, the EU exported more than 190 billion euros worth of cars. So a cartel like the one between the maritime car carriers, which raised the cost of exporting European cars, is a threat to European industry and jobs.

What today's cases have in common is their relation to a key sector for European industry and consumers – cars and trucks. And if we do find that companies have broken the competition rules in this sector, we will take firm action – as we have done today.

Daily News 21 / 02 / 2018

College meeting: European Commission reinforces its senior management and President Juncker reorganises his close team – European Commission appoints new Secretary-General

After over 32 years at the service of the European Commission, the current Secretary-General Alexander **Italianer**, has decided to retire from the European Commission. As a result, and on the proposal of President Jean-Claude **Juncker**, the College has decided to appoint Martin Selmayr, the current Head of Cabinet of the President, as the new Secretary-General of the Commission. This decision will take effect on 1 March. At the same time, President Juncker has decided that his current Deputy Head of Cabinet, Clara Martinez Alberola, will become his new Head of Cabinet – the first-ever female Head of Cabinet of a Commission President. President **Juncker**'s current Diplomatic Adviser, Richard Szostak, will become his new Deputy Head of Cabinet. President **Juncker** said: *"This morning, Alexander Italianer confirmed to me his wish to retire as Secretary-General of the Commission as of 1 March. I want to express my deep gratitude to him for decades of loyal service to the European Commission and over the past three years to me as its President. I truly appreciated working with such an experienced and knowledgeable Secretary-General and I want to thank him for his skillful steer of our administration, as well as for having agreed to stay on for another month to ensure a smooth transition. I am also glad that he agreed to continue to advise me, after 1 April, as Special Adviser on strategic issues on the EU's agenda, in particular the Multiannual Financial Framework and Brexit Preparedness."* A full [press release](#) is available online. (For more information: Margaritis Schinas – Tel.: +32 229 60524; Mina Andreeva – Tel.:

+32 229 913825)

College meeting: Five new Directors-General and five new Deputy Directors-General for the Juncker Commission

Today the European Commission decided on a number of appointments concerning its top management level. Appointing the best people to the right positions will help the Juncker Commission deliver strongly in 2018/2019 and beyond. Today's senior management decisions concern key strategic areas of the Juncker Commission's work, ranging from climate action, research, education, youth and culture via social affairs and employment to the Commission's Secretariat-General and the President's Cabinet. Today's appointments will significantly boost the number of women in the position of Directors-General and Deputy Directors-General from just 11% in November 2014 to 36% now. This is the result of [President Juncker's commitment](#) to reach a target of 40% by 31 October 2019. Commissioner Günther H. **Oettinger** in charge of Budget and Human Resources said: *"By appointing the best people to the right positions, we are determined to use the current window of opportunity and deliver on our political agenda. We are building on the experience of our senior managers, making sure they continue to serve the interest of this institution. I will continue to place a strong emphasis on achieving President Juncker's target of at least 40% of women in the Commission's management."* A full [press release](#) is available online. (For more information: Margaritis Schinas – Tel.: +32 229 60524; Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 229 913825)

College meeting: Antitrust: Commission fines maritime car carriers and car parts suppliers a total of €546 million in three separate cartel settlements

In three separate decisions, the European Commission has fined today four maritime car carriers €395 million, two suppliers of spark plugs €76 million, and two suppliers of braking systems €75 million, for taking part in cartels, in breach of EU antitrust rules. In particular, the European Commission found: i) that the Chilean maritime carrier CSAV, the Japanese carriers "K" Line, MOL and NYK, and the Norwegian/Swedish carrier WWL-EUKOR participated in a cartel concerning intercontinental maritime transport of vehicles; ii) that Bosch (Germany), Denso and NGK (both Japan) participated in a cartel concerning supplies of spark plugs to car manufacturers in the European Economic Area; and iii) that TRW (USA, now ZF TRW, Germany), Bosch (Germany) and Continental (Germany) took part in a cartel concerning the supply of hydraulic braking systems and that Bosch and Continental also took part in a separate cartel concerning the supply of electronic braking systems. All companies acknowledged their involvement in the cartels and agreed to settle the cases. Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy said: *"The Commission has sanctioned several companies for colluding in the maritime transport of cars and the supply of car parts. The three separate decisions taken today show that we will not tolerate anticompetitive behaviour affecting European consumers and industries. By raising component prices or transport costs for cars, the cartels ultimately hurt European consumers and adversely impacted the competitiveness of the European*

automotive sector, which employs around 12 million people in the EU.” The full press release is available online in [EN](#), [FR](#), [DE](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Sarantopoulou – Tel.: +32 229 13740)

EU Industry Day – 600 participants, one credo: “modernise our industry”

After a first successful edition last year, [EU Industry Day](#) is coming back with an extended edition. On 22 and 23 February, 600 participants representing key industrial, finance, research and innovation players as well as high-level EU policymakers will gather in Brussels. They will take stock of the ambitious [strategic approach to industrial policy](#) presented by President **Juncker** last autumn and debate the future of European industry on the “Road to 2030”. President **Juncker** will deliver a video message, and the Commission will be prominently represented by Vice-Presidents Maroš **Šefčovič** and Jyrki **Katainen** as well as Commissioners Elżbieta **Bieńkowska** and Carlos **Moedas**. The High-Level Industrial Roundtable ‘Industry 2030’, chaired by Vice-President **Katainen**, will meet for the first time, as an important advisory instrument for the implementation of the Commission’s renewed industrial policy. EU leadership in the transition to clean and sustainable energy is a big priority to the Commission and this is demonstrated by the launch of the first edition of the Clean Energy Industrial Forum, centred around three industry-led initiatives: batteries, renewables and construction. Industrial actors will present 20 priority actions as part of the new European Battery Alliance. The Commission will launch a €10 million EIC Horizon Prize for the development of a reliable, safe, low-cost battery for e-vehicles, and sign a €52.6 million InnovFin loan for the start-up Northvolt to build a gigafactory for battery cells in Europe. The role of key enabling technologies, such as micro and nanoelectronics, to modernise European industry, boost innovation and solve societal challenges will also be discussed. The Commission’s High Level Strategy Group for Industrial Technologies chaired by Jürgen Rüttgers will present preliminary results on its work and propose to include artificial intelligence as well as security and connectivity as part of these key transformative technologies in the next framework programme for research and innovation. Four dedicated factsheets on the key pillars and announcements of the EU Industry Day are available: [batteries production](#), [renewable energies](#), [skills development](#) and the [construction sector](#). Speeches can be followed via [webstream](#) or [EbS](#) and will be published ([first day](#), [second day](#)) subsequently. Further information: [full agenda](#), [registration](#), and [press information](#). (For more information: Lucía Caudet – Tel.: +32 229 56182; Victoria von Hammerstein – Tel.: +32 229 55040; Maud Noyon – Tel. +32 229-80379)

European Citizens’ Initiative: Commission closes an infringement case against Italy

The Commission decided today to close its infringement procedure against Italy regarding the national rules on the certification of online collection systems for European Citizens’ Initiatives. The previous national rules obliged organisers of the European citizens’ initiatives to obtain an ex ante evaluation of their online collection systems by an external body before requesting the certification of the systems to the competent national

authority in Italy (“Agenzia per l’Italia Digitale”). Such national rules run against EU law (Regulation (EU) No 211/2011). Italy has adopted new national rules for the certification of the online collection systems in conformity with EU law and the infringement procedure is, therefore, closed. The new rules ensure that organisers of initiatives in Italy can obtain the certification of their online collection systems in a more simple way and within one month. According to EU law, the national authorities in the Member States are responsible to carry out the certification of online collection systems for European Citizens’ Initiatives within one month and without the need for organisers to obtain an additional ex ante evaluation by an external body other than the designated authorities. (For more information: Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 229 91382; Uldis Šalajevs – Tel.: +32 229 67560)

La Commission européenne et l’UEFA consolident leur coopération

Tibor **Navracsics**, Commissaire en charge de l’Education, de la Culture, de la Jeunesse et du Sport, et Aleksander Čeferin, Président de l’Union des associations européennes de football (UEFA), signent aujourd’hui un [nouvel accord](#), engageant les deux parties à renforcer leur coopération entamée en 2014. Les priorités communes incluent, entre autres, l’intégrité du sport, la bonne gouvernance et l’égalité des genres ainsi que la plupart des défis auxquels le sport est confronté aujourd’hui, notamment la violence, le trucage de matchs, une fiscalité équitable, le dopage et le racisme. Le premier vice-président, Frans **Timmermans**, a déclaré: “Je suis heureux que la Commission européenne et l’UEFA continuent de travailler ensemble pour promouvoir nos valeurs communes grâce à ce sport qui compte tant pour de nombreux Européens. Le football, grâce à son impact considérable, peut être un allié important dans la lutte contre le racisme et la discrimination et pour la promotion de la solidarité, de la durabilité et de l’égalité sur le terrain et dans notre vie quotidienne.” Le Commissaire **Navracsics** a, pour sa part, déclaré: “Le football est bien plus qu’un jeu, une passion ou un divertissement. Le sport en général – et le football en particulier – occupe une place centrale dans la vie de nombreux Européens et le nouvel accord de coopération avec l’UEFA nous aidera à continuer à traiter de questions clés telles que la bonne gouvernance, la durabilité et l’égalité des genres, au profit du football européen mais aussi nos sociétés en général.” Un communiqué de presse complet est disponible [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d’informations: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tél.: +32 229 67083, Joseph Waldstein – Tél.: +32 229 56184)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of joint control over Flexera by TA Associates and OTPP

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of joint control over Flexera Holdings LP of the US by TA Associates L.P. of the US and Ontarios Teachers’ Pension Plan Board (“OTPP”) of Canada. Flexera provides software products and services. TA Associates is active in private equity investments through various funds in selected industries. OTPP is active in the administration of pension benefits and investment of pension plan assets on behalf of active and retired teachers in the Canadian province of Ontario. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns because Flexera has

negligible actual and foreseen activities within the European Economic Area. The transaction was examined under the simplified merger review procedure. More information is available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the [public case register](#) under the case number [M.8798](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Sarantopoulou – Tel.: +32 229 13740)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

10 years of the Covenant of Mayors: Local and regional leadership for clean energy and climate action

The EU Covenant of Mayors is the world's largest movement for local climate action and energy transition, bringing together more than 9,200 local and regional authorities across the Europe, determined to take action to help meeting the EU climate and energy objectives. On 22 February the Covenant will celebrate its 10th anniversary in a [ceremony](#) at the European Parliament in Brussels. Covenant members will be joined by Commission Vice-President for the Energy Union Maroš Šefčovič and Commissioners Miguel **Arias Cañete** (Climate Action, Energy) and Carlos **Moedas** (Research, Science and Innovation). This will be an opportunity to reflect on the success of this movement over the past 10 years and to look ahead to the future. It is expected that mayors and cities will pledge their 2030 objectives for greenhouse gas emissions reductions and present solutions to climate change adaptation. They will showcase ways to create jobs, foster investment while improving the health and the quality of life of citizens. The event will also highlight the central role of the cities in meeting the objectives agreed in the Paris Agreement on climate change. At the ceremony, Commissioner **Moedas** will open the 2018 [European Capital of Innovation](#) contest (also known as iCapital) – a €1 million prize to reward the cities and mayors who have built the most dynamic innovation ecosystems, for the benefit of European citizens and businesses. On 21 February, the [Covenant of Mayors Investment Forum](#) and Energy Efficiency Finance Market Place will also take place in Brussels. This will be an opportunity to address the key success factors for financing [clean urban transport](#), building renovation and [energy efficiency at the operational level](#). Participants will share their experience of the development of bankable investment pipelines that could be replicated elsewhere. Stands will also showcase successful projects and [resources available to support project promoters](#). (For more information: Anna-Kaisa Itkonen – Tel.: +32 229 56186; Lucía Caudet – Tel. +32 229 56182)

Commissioner Avramopoulos in New York for meetings at the United Nations

Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris **Avramopoulos** will be in New York on Thursday 22 February for meetings at the United Nations to discuss issues related to migration, security and border management. He will meet with Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, Miroslav Lajčák, President of the United Nations General

Assembly for the 72nd session, Louise Arbour, United Nations Special Representative for International Migration and Vladimir Voronkov, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Office. (For more information: *Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456; Tove Ernst – Tel.: +32 229 86764; Markus Lammert – Tel.: +32 299 80423*)

Commissioner Crețu in Rome, discusses Cohesion policy implementation in the country and the future EU budget

Tomorrow, Commissioner for Regional policy Corina **Crețu** will be in Rome, where she will meet Claudio De Vincenti, Minister for the Territorial Cohesion and the Mezzogiorno and deliver a speech at the launch event of the book 'Come Fratelli', on the integration of Romanians in the Italian society. The Commissioner said, ahead of her visit: *"Cohesion policy programmes in Italy must be implemented swiftly, so the country does not lose any EU money and so the benefits of EU investments are quickly felt by citizens. Of course my visit also focuses very much on the future of the policy, especially ahead of the Leaders' summit on Friday. The Commission set out a number of options and scenarios and now is the time for choices."* (For more information: *Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526*)

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