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[Statement by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini and Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos Stylianides on the humanitarian situation in Eastern Ghouta and Idlib, Syria](#)

The humanitarian situation in parts of Syria, in particular in the De-escalation Areas of Eastern Ghouta and Idlib, has deteriorated significantly over the past 8 weeks with hundreds of innocent victims, including many women and children.

There have been dozens of civilian deaths and hundreds of wounded in Eastern Ghouta yesterday alone. More than 300,000 civilians have been displaced in the northern Governorate of Idlib, with destruction of civilian infrastructure, such as hospitals.

Unhindered humanitarian access to civilians inside Syria and the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure is a matter of urgency to prevent further loss of lives. To prevent further children and families, the most vulnerable, being killed. The international community should unite to stop this human suffering.

The European Union calls on all parties to the conflict, as well as the guarantors of the four De-Escalation Areas, to take all necessary measures to ensure the decrease of violence, the protection of the Syrian people by respecting International Humanitarian Law, and urgent humanitarian access. There is no military solution to the conflict, we call on all parties to seriously engage in the UN-led political process.

This was notably discussed yesterday by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini and a delegation of the Syria Negotiation Committee (SNC) led by its President, Mr Nasr Hariri, accompanied by women representatives. The need to urgently make progress on the political track under UN auspices and to maintain the international engagement to solve the political and humanitarian situation in Syria was recalled by all the participants. In this respect, the EU will host the second Brussels Conference on 24-25 April, using its convening power to maintain the focus of the international community on the Syria crisis and to see how to best support the UN-led political process in this difficult time.

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EU supports the victims of tropical cyclone Gita

The European Commission has mobilised its emergency assistance tools following significant damage caused by tropical cyclone Gita in the South Pacific, in particular on the islands of Tonga. Initial emergency assistance of €100,000 has been released to the disaster fund of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to help provide life-saving aid, starting from the most urgent needs for shelter, water and sanitation, as well as health assistance. The Commission has also activated the European satellite mapping system Copernicus, which has already provided maps of some of the most affected areas of the archipelago. *“Many people have been severely affected and the European Union has provided an initial amount of emergency assistance to support the work of the first responders on the ground to deliver vital assistance to the worst-hit parts of the impacted islands. Our thoughts go to the families of the victims and to all those affected,”* said Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos **Stylianides**. A Commission humanitarian expert has also been dispatched for a rapid assessment of the situation on the ground. The Commission’s 24/7 [Emergency Response Coordination Centre](#) is closely monitoring the situation on the islands and in the region. *(For more information: Carlos Martin Ruiz De Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Daniel Puglisi – Tel.: +32 229 69140)*

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Actaeon by ReAssure

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of Actaeon by ReAssure, both of the UK. Actaeon provides life

insurance based pensions, savings and investments products in the UK. ReAssure is a company controlled by SwissRe, a globally active insurance and reinsurance provider. The Commission concluded that the proposed transaction would raise no competition concerns given the limited market shares of the companies in the UK market. The transaction was examined under the simplified merger review procedure. More information is available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the public [case register](#) under the case number [M.8761](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Sarantopoulou – Tel.: +32 229 13740)

Mergers: Commission approves acquisition of joint control over a newly created car-sharing joint venture by Repsol and KIA

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of joint control over a newly created full function joint venture by Repsol and KIA, both of Spain. The joint venture will carry out a car-sharing business in Madrid. Repsol is a publicly listed integrated energy company headquartered in Madrid. KIA is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Kia Motors Company, the holding for the Kia Group, and is ultimately controlled by Hyundai Motor Company. It operates as a cars distributor in Spain. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition of joint control would raise no competition concerns given in particular the very limited size of the activities of the joint venture. The operation was examined under the simplified merger review procedure. More information will be available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the [public case register](#) under the case number [M.8783](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Sarantopoulou – Tel.: +32 229 13740)

State aid: Commission approves partial compensation granted to Post Office Limited for the operation of a network of post offices across the UK

The European Commission has concluded that the financial compensation granted by the UK to Post Office Limited (POL) is in line with EU State aid rules. The support relates to the operation of a network of post offices across the UK that is larger than what POL would have chosen to operate purely for commercial reasons. In January 2018, the UK notified to the Commission its intention to grant partial compensation of around £370 million (about €418 million) to POL for delivering services of general economic interest (SGEIs) during the next funding period. The Commission already approved SGEI compensation measures to POL for the delivery of these SGEIs in two previous decisions, [in 2012](#) and [in 2015](#). The Commission carefully assessed the compensation measure and concluded that it amounts to State aid compatible with the internal market pursuant to Article 106(2) TFEU. The compensation measure fulfils all the conditions of the 2012 SGEI Framework and POL will be entrusted with clearly defined public services obligations during a period of three years. In addition, the scheme includes safeguards to avoid overcompensation. In particular, under the measure approved today, POL will only be partially compensated and will also implement account separation and an ex-post control mechanism. This Commission decision will apply until the UK ceases to be a member of the EU. More information will be available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the State Aid Register under the case number SA.48224. (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229

80100; Maria Sarantopoulou – Tel.: +32 229 13740)

Eurostat: Près de quatre enfants sur dix dans l'UE fréquentent des structures formelles de garde d'enfants

En 2016, 39 % des enfants âgés de 12 ans ou moins dans l'Union européenne (UE) ont fréquenté des structures formelles de garde d'enfants, 29% à un prix plein ou réduit, 10% fréquentant des structures gratuites. Le recours à des structures payantes est similaire dans les zones urbaines, suburbaines et rurales (environ un tiers des enfants ont fréquenté des structures d'accueil à un prix plein ou réduit dans toutes les zones). En revanche, il existe de légères différences en fonction des zones concernant le recours aux structures gratuites: 11% dans les villes, 10% dans les agglomérations et les banlieues et à peine 6% dans les zones rurales. Un communiqué de presse est disponible [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: + 32 229 67094)

STATEMENTS

Opening speeches by First Vice-President Timmermans and Commissioner Bieńkowska at the Circular Economy Stakeholder Conference

This morning First Vice-President **Timmermans** and Commissioner **Bieńkowska** opened the third annual Circular Economy Stakeholder Conference, addressing a fully-booked room in Brussels and an online audience. Vice-President **Katainen** and Commissioner **Vella** will address the Conference this afternoon. First Vice-President **Timmermans** said this morning: *"The circular economy is about more than the economy, it's more about more than just plastics. It's about creating a positive attitude to the future, it's about creating a sense that our future can be more prosperous, that there is a place for everyone in the circular economy. If Europe leads in this, Europe will also be the first who profits from this."* Commissioner **Bieńkowska** added: *"There is a very powerful business case behind the circular economy. More precisely, there is a specific industrial case for the circular economy. It is one of the drivers that can help our continent rebuild and renew its industrial base."* The [speech of First Vice-President Timmermans](#) and the [speech of Commissioner Bieńkowska](#) are available online. The afternoon sessions, including the speeches of Vice-President **Katainen** and Commissioner **Vella**, and day two of the conference, can be followed online [here](#). (Lucía Caudet – Tel.: +32 229 56182; Enrico Brivio – Tel.: +32 229 56172)

Statement by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini and Commissioner Stylianides on the humanitarian situation in Eastern Ghouta and Idlib, Syria

"The humanitarian situation in parts of Syria, in particular in the De-Escalation Areas of Eastern Ghouta and Idlib, has deteriorated significantly over the past 8 weeks with hundreds of innocent victims, including many women

and children. There have been dozens of civilian deaths and hundreds of wounded in Eastern Ghouta yesterday alone. More than 300,000 civilians have been displaced in the northern Governorate of Idlib, with destruction of civilian infrastructure, such as hospitals. Unhindered humanitarian access to civilians inside Syria and the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure is a matter of urgency to prevent further loss of lives. To prevent further children and families, the most vulnerable, being killed. The international community should unite to stop this human suffering. The European Union calls on all parties to the conflict, as well as the guarantors of the four De-Escalation Areas, to take all necessary measures to ensure the decrease of violence, the protection of the Syrian people by respecting International Humanitarian Law, and urgent humanitarian access. There is no military solution to the conflict, we call on all parties to seriously engage in the UN-led political process". Read the full statement [here](#). (For more information: Catherine Ray – Tel.: +32 229 69921; Carlos Martin Ruiz De Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Lauranne Devillé – Tel.: +32 229 80833; Daniel Puglisi – Tel.: +32 229 69140)

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

[– An Industrial Ambition for the Circular Economy – Speech by Commissioner Elżbieta Bieńkowska at the 2018 Circular Economy Stakeholder Conference](#)

Introduction

Thank you, Jacki [Davis, moderator].

Thank you, Frans [Timmermans].

And thank you also Mr President [of the Economic and Social Committee] for your inspiring words.

I am happy to be here.

I would like to warmly thank you all for being here.

I hope you will stay in Brussels for the Industry Day taking place on Thursday and Friday.

That will give you even more chances to discuss how to promote resource

efficiency and green industrial processes.

The industrial case for the circular economy

The circular economy is about producing and consuming differently.

It is about innovation: inventing or re-inventing new ways of doing business.

Doing more with less.

There is indeed a very powerful business case behind the circular economy.

More precisely, there is a specific industrial case for the circular economy.

It is one of the drivers that can help Europe to rebuild and renew its industrial base.

This new industrial base will be very different from that of the 20th century.

It is the one we depict in the Renewed European Industrial Policy Strategy that we published in September last year.

I want to take this opportunity to welcome the opinion the Economic and Social Committee adopted last week on our Industrial Policy Strategy and thank you for the constructive comments.

Our renewed industrial strategy not only reconciles the economy and the environment.

It also integrates all the megatrends affecting the economy: digitalisation; the skills revolution; the innovation challenge; globalisation and energy security.

Above all, it fully integrates the low-carbon and circular transition.

Roughly two thirds of the world's greenhouse gas emissions are connected to material management and flows.

So the contribution of the circular economy to decarbonisation will be especially important.

It is also an industrial approach in which all kinds of businesses have a role to play, including traditional enterprises and social ones.

The contribution of the recent Circular Economy Package

Our economy has started to make this transition.

But, according to Eurostat, only roughly 10% of our raw material use is circular.

This leaves us with huge room for improvement.

Industry must take the lead.

There is no other way.

But the public sector has a role in creating incentives, instruments and a supportive regulatory framework.

At European level, since we have been engaged in very intense legislative work on waste management.

And in January, we set out a 3rd Circular Economy Package.

Obviously, the Plastics Strategy is an important part of this new package.

It is going to be widely discussed in a moment.

Here again, there is a huge business case.

Only 14% of all plastic packaging is recycled globally. It endangers our environment and results in a loss of 80 to 120 billion dollars a year globally.

What we have proposed is to address the systemic failures in the plastics value chain.

I mean all these plastic wastes that some Member States even export abroad.

All plastics packaging are set to be reused or easily recycled by 2030.

This will require transformation of the industry and call for more innovation. The Chinese import ban on plastic waste has put even more pressure to transform.

We will support this by developing a Strategic Research Innovation Agenda for Plastics, which will be released later this year.

I cannot say exactly what will be in it, but it is clear that we will need more standardisation and awareness raising campaigns.

We need to review and revise existing regulatory frameworks.

And maybe to think about setting up new legal initiatives.

We need to think about developing alternative feedstocks for plastic production and boosting the market for recycled plastics.

The ideas of fiscal measures on plastics at EU level and specific funds for innovation in the plastics sector have raised a lot of attention.

These are interesting ideas.

We are looking into them: pros, cons and uncertainties.

I would also like to mention here the analysis of the interface between

chemicals, products, and the waste legislation.

It especially helps clarify the conditions for a safe, competitive and credible secondary raw material market.

And such a market is a core element of a well-functioning circular economy.

All this supports the Industrial Strategy as much as the Industrial Strategy supports the Circular Economy Action Plan.

Stakeholder engagement for the circular economy

This is the third time you gather here.

This conference is one of the pillars of the European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform.

This is what makes the Circular Economy Action Plan special: its capacity to involve, engage and debate with open minds and in full transparency.

Most importantly: YOU are the Stakeholder Platform.

You can contribute here, today and tomorrow, and during the Industry Day.

You can contribute by putting forward voluntary commitments.

Your success stories, your strategic plans can all be disseminated through the website of the Stakeholder Platform.

So, be active!

Conclusion

The industry of tomorrow will not only be connected, more innovative, and more user-driven.

It will also be a circular, low carbon industry.

These two parts are not separate: they complement each other.

Our plans are ambitious.

And that means us as individuals and stakeholders, but also the institutions, working together.

We rely on you to make this transition a reality.