

## **News story: Nigel Halkes Reappointed as Deputy Chair of VisitEngland**

Prior to his appointment as Deputy Chair of the VisitEngland Advisory Board, Nigel has served a four year term as a Board Member of VisitEngland during a time of major change for the organisation. Nigel has made a significant contribution to VisitEngland, including the establishment of the Discover England Fund and the outsourcing of the Quality Assurance Schemes to the AA. He has also served on the Audit Committee of the British Tourism Authority.

Nigel is an experienced Non-Executive Director with a portfolio spanning the public, private and charitable sectors. He sits on two PLC board and is a Trustee of the EY Foundation and the Polka Theatre for Children. Nigel was formerly the Managing Partner Markets for EY in the UK & Ireland, responsible for major clients, including hospitality and leisure businesses.

The role is not remunerated. This appointment has been made in accordance with the Cabinet Office's Governance Code on Public Appointments. The appointments process is regulated by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Under the Code, any significant political activity undertaken by an appointee in the last five years must be declared. This is defined as including holding office, public speaking, making a recordable donation, or candidature for election. Nigel has declared no such political activity.

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## **News story: 'Far too many serious pollution incidents' says Environment Agency water quality report**

Environment Agency Chair, Emma Howard Boyd has called on water companies and farmers to cut the amount of pollution incidents harming England's waters and for penalties to be made tougher, as the EA publishes [The State of the Environment: Water Quality](#) report today.

Although the number of serious incidents has fallen by almost two thirds since 2001, the report reveals that 317 occurred in 2016. Agriculture is now the largest sector responsible for water pollution, while the number of serious incidents by water companies has remained at around 60 per year for the past decade – more than one a week.

The report shows that water quality has improved markedly over the last 30 years, following more than a century of poorly regulated industrial practices. England has the cleanest bathing waters since records began and

rivers that were biologically dead are reviving. But there is more work to do to achieve the Environment Agency's ambition of a cleaner, healthier and better managed water environment

Emma Howard Boyd, Chair of the Environment Agency, said:

Water quality is better than at any time since the Industrial Revolution thanks to tougher regulation and years of hard work by the Environment Agency and others.

But there are still far too many serious pollution incidents which damage the local environment, threaten wildlife and, in the worst cases, put the public at risk.

I would like to see fines made proportionate to the turnover of the company and for the courts to apply these penalties consistently. Anything less is no deterrent.

The report reveals that the Environment Agency has taken more than 50 million samples to monitor water quality over the past 20 years. In 2016, 76% of the tests used to measure the health of rivers were rated good. However, only 14% of rivers reached good ecological status overall – this is because the failure of one test means the whole water body fails to obtain good or better status.

The most common reason for rivers not achieving good status was phosphorus, which produces algae and depletes oxygen. More than half of rivers have been found to have unacceptable levels of phosphorus, caused by sewage effluent and pollutants from farmland.

The report also states that groundwaters have been deteriorating in quality over the last 60 years with only 53% achieving good chemical status in 2016.

Defra's [25-year environment plan](#) sets out a challenge to improve at least three quarters of waters so that they are close to their natural state. The report identifies population growth, climate change and plastic pollution as some of the potential threats to water quality in future.

It calls on businesses and the public to do more to protect the environment by disposing of household chemicals responsibly, not putting fats and oils down the drain, and minimising use of single-use plastics.

[Read the State of the Environment: Water Quality report](#)

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## Indicative Programme – Economic and Financial Affairs Council meeting of 20 February 2018

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## December 2017 compared with November 2017-Production in construction up by 0.1% in euro area -Up by 0.6% in EU28

In December 2017 compared with November 2017, seasonally adjusted production in the construction sector increased by 0.1% in the **euro area** (EA19) and by 0.6% in the **EU28**, according to first estimates from **Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union**. In November 2017, production in construction grew by 0.2% in the **euro area** and by 0.5% in the **EU28**.

[Full text available on EUROSTAT website](#)

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# Daily News 19 / 02 / 2018

## **Preparation of the Eurogroup and ECOFIN meetings, 19-20 February 2018**

Vice-President **Dombrovskis** and Commissioner **Moscovici** will represent the European Commission at today's Eurogroup and tomorrow's ECOFIN meeting. Today, the ministers will take stock of progress made with the implementation of the remaining prior actions of the third review of the stability support programme for Greece. The Eurogroup will be debriefed on the post-programme surveillance mission to Ireland. The ministers will hold two discussions on the deepening of EMU: on the future of the ESM and the way forward on the Banking Union. The latter debate will take place in the inclusive format. Commissioner **Moscovici** will participate in the press conference following the meeting. On Tuesday, the Council will exchange views on the EU's approach towards sustainable finance, following the recent recommendations by the High-Level Expert Group established by the Commission. Later in March, the Commission is due to present its Action Plan for a financial system that supports sustainable investments. Ministers will also discuss issues related to the **EU budget**, namely the budgetary discharge for 2016 and guidelines for negotiations on the budget for 2019. The Council is expected to issue a recommendation on the nomination of a new vice-president of the **European Central Bank**. Vice-President **Dombrovskis** will participate in the press conference following the ECOFIN. *(For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Vanessa Mock – Tel.: +32 229 56194; Annikky Lamp – Tel.: +32 229 56151; Enda McNamara – Tel.: +32 229 64976, Letizia Lupini – Tel.: +32 229 51958; Patrick McCullough – Tel.: +32 229 87183)*

## **Key railway connection between Romania and Hungary modernised with Cohesion Policy funds**

€1.3 billion from the [Cohesion Fund](#) is invested in the modernisation of the rail corridor from the town of Curtici, on the border between Romania and Hungary, and Constanța, by the Black sea. Works will focus on significantly increasing speed and safety on the section between Curtici and the town of Simeria, upgrading 13 train stations on the line, improving signalling and passenger information systems and building adjacent infrastructure such as bridges and tunnels. Commissioner for Regional policy Corina **Crețu** said: *"Each euro from the EU budget invested in this railway enhances territorial cohesion and economic competitiveness in Romania, further connects the country with Hungary and the rest of Europe and ensures clean, fast and safe mobility. That's a project with 65% EU co-financing and 100% EU value added."* The railway connection, part of the [Orient-East Med](#) and [Rhine-Danube](#) corridors of the Trans-European Transport Network ([TEN-T](#)), crosses Romania from West to East. Several sections on the railway have been or are currently being financed with other EU funds, such as the Connecting Europe Facility ([CEF](#)) and European Investment Bank ([EIB](#)) funding. *(For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)*

## **Publication of latest agri-food trade figures: EU agri-food exports are holding strong**

The value of EU agri-food exports reached €137.9 billion in 2017, corresponding to a sustained increase by 5.1% in value terms compared to 2016. Published today by the European Commission, the [latest monthly trade report](#) details the export values for different sectors and origin. Major gains in annual values have been achieved in agri-food exports to the USA (+6%), Russia (+16%) and several Asian markets: Japan (+11%), China (+5%), Hong Kong (+10%) and South Korea (+13%). The sectors of wine, pet food and spirits and liqueurs performed very well in terms of exports over the last 12 months. On the other hand, wheat and other cereals and pig meat exports decreased. EU agri-food imports also increased but at a slower pace than exports meaning that the trade balance for agri-food products remains positive with an export surplus at €20.5 billion. The full report is [online](#). (For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel.: +32 229 56185; Clémence Robin – Tel: +32 229 52509)

## **La Commission approuve une nouvelle appellation d'origine protégée pour un vin de Hongrie**

La Commission européenne a approuvé la demande d'inscription des vins hongrois "[Monor, Monori](#)" dans le registre des appellations d'origine protégées (AOP). Les vins produits sous l'appellation "Monor, Monori" peuvent être blancs, rosés ou rouges. Les blancs et rosés sont vifs et frais avec des arômes floraux tandis que les rouges ont plutôt des arômes de fruits ou épices. Ils sont issus de différents cépages de variétés internationales et traditionnelles hongroises, tels que le Cabernet franc, le Kékfrankos, le Chardonnay ou le Hárslevelű, tous cultivés autour de la ville de Monor dans le centre du pays. La région se prête bien à la culture de la vigne. Les températures varient en fonction de la saison, mais jamais de manière extrême. La production de raisin dans la zone délimitée a commencé au XVe siècle, lorsque des vignes ont été plantées après le défrichage de vastes zones boisées. Cette nouvelle appellation va rejoindre plus de 1755 vins déjà protégés dont la liste est disponible dans la base de données [e-bacchus](#). Pour plus d'informations, voir aussi les pages sur la [politique de qualité](#). (pour plus d'information: Daniel Rosario – Tel: +32 2 29 56185; Clémence Robin – Tel: +32 229 52 509)

## **State aid: Commission approves State financing for Czech Post's universal service obligation**

The European Commission has found State support to Czech Post for the provision of the postal universal service obligation in the Czech Republic between 2013 and 2017 to be in line with EU State aid rules. In particular, Czech Post delivers universal postal services throughout the country at affordable prices and at certain minimum quality requirements. Czech Post will be compensated through direct grants from the State budget of a maximum

of CZK 2.6 billion (approximately €97.63 million) for the entire period. The Commission assessed the measure under [EU State aid rules on public service compensation](#), which allow companies to be compensated for the extra cost of providing a public service under certain conditions. The rules enables Member States to grant state aid for the provision of public services whilst at the same time making sure that companies entrusted with such services are not overcompensated, which minimises distortions of competition and guarantees an efficient use of public resources. The Commission concluded that the compensation to Czech Post is in line with EU State aid rules. The compensation granted to Czech Post is based on a sound methodology, which ensures that it will not exceed the cost of the public service mission. More information will be available, once potential confidentiality issues have been resolved, in the public [case register](#) on the Commission's [competition](#) website under the case number SA.45281. *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: + 32 229 80100; Yizhou Ren – Tel.: +32 229 94889)*

### **Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of newly created joint venture between HASCO and Magna**

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the proposed acquisition of joint control over the newly created joint venture HASCO Magna Electric Drive System Co., Ltd (“E-Drive”) by Huayu Automotive Systems Company Ltd. (“HASCO”), both of China, and Magna International Inc. (“Magna”) of Canada. E-Drive Ltd aims to assemble e-motors, gearboxes, inverters and other related parts into an e-drive powertrain system and sell it to original equipment manufacturers. HASCO, controlled by Shanghai Automotive Industry Corporation Group of China, is active in the production and sale of automotive components for a variety of car manufacturers. Magna is active globally in the manufacture and supply of automotive components, including e-drive power train systems. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns because of the negligible actual and foreseen activities of E-Drive in 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.8753. *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: + 32 229 80100; Yizhou Ren – Tel.: +32 229 94889)*

### **Eurostat: La production dans le secteur de la construction en hausse de 0,1% dans la zone euro**

En décembre 2017 par rapport à novembre 2017, la production dans le secteur de la construction, corrigée des variations saisonnières, a augmenté de 0,1% dans la zone euro (ZE19) et de 0,6% dans l'UE28, selon les premières estimations d'Eurostat, l'office statistique de l'Union européenne. En novembre 2017, la production dans le secteur de la construction avait progressé de 0,2% dans la zone euro et de 0,5% dans l'UE28. Un communiqué de

presse est disponible [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Lucia Caudet – Tél.: +32 229 56182; Maud Noyan – Tél.: +32 229 80379)

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### **Circular Economy Stakeholder Conference: delivering on the circular economy and discussing plans for the future**

Tomorrow and Wednesday, the Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee will host in Brussels the third Circular Economy Stakeholder Conference. Organised back-to-back with the [EU Industry Day](#), this stakeholder conference, an initiative of the Juncker Commission, will bring together businesses, local authorities, and citizens to discuss recent initiatives and new areas of action in the transition to a more circular, resource-efficient and low-carbon economy. They will also examine the recently adopted [EU Strategy for Plastics](#) and consider possible actions in this area, such as the on-going work on single use plastics and local initiatives, synergies, partnerships and business cases for more sustainable use of plastics. Participants will also share the first achievements of the [European Circular Economy Stakeholder Platform](#) that was established last year. Commission First Vice-President **Timmermans** will open the conference and highlight the successes and remaining challenges of the transition towards a circular economy; Vice-President **Katainen** will focus on opportunities linked to the international angle of the circular economy; Commissioner **Bieńkowska** will discuss the industrial dimension and Commissioner **Vella** will encourage businesses and public authorities to become “more circular” through ambitious plans and actions. The Commission has already delivered most of the actions presented in its [2015 Action Plan](#) for the Circular Economy and is counting on the support of citizens, stakeholders, the European Parliament and the Council to make a faster move from traditional linear economic models to more innovative and efficient circular systems of production and consumption. The conference can be followed live [here](#) and the programme is available [here](#). (Lucía Caudet – Tel.: +32 229 56182; Enrico Brivio – Tel.: +32 229 56172)

### **Future of EU finances – Commissioner Oettinger meets with Italian Finance Minister Pier Carlo Padoan**

Commissioner Günther H. **Oettinger**, in charge of Budget and Human Resources, will meet with Italian Finance Minister Pier Carlo Padoan on Tuesday, 20 February 2018 in Brussels, to discuss the future of EU finances and the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework (#EUBudget). Building on the [Reflection paper on the future of EU finances](#) that Commissioner **Oettinger** presented together with Commissioner **Crețu**, as well as the Communication “A new, modern Multiannual Financial Framework for a EU that delivers efficiently on its priorities post-2020”, the debate has also been taken up by the European Parliament, where two own initiative reports are being prepared. Heads of

State or Government are also scheduled to discuss the next Multi-Annual Financial Framework at their informal meeting on 23 February. The Commission launched a series of [public consultations](#) on the priorities of the EU and stakeholders' views will be taken into account when preparing the next MFF, to be presented in early May 2018 at the latest. As part of this ongoing debate, Commissioner **Oettinger** has invited the Finance Minister of Italy, Pier Carlo Padoan, to share his perspective on the future of EU finances with key stakeholders from the European Parliament and high-ranking Commission officials and representatives from a number of Brussels think tanks. See also a speech "[A Budget Matching our Ambitions](#)" given by Commissioner Günther H. **Oettinger** at the conference "[Shaping our Future](#)" on 8 January 2018. (*For more information: Tove Ernst- Tel.: +32 229 86764; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526*)

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