

# Daily News 01 / 02 / 2018

## **Safer drinking water for all Europeans**

Today, the European Commission is proposing to revise the [EU Drinking Water Directive](#), to improve the quality and the access of citizens to drinking water, as well as provide better information to consumers. The right to access essential services of good quality, including water, is one of the principles of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) unanimously proclaimed by European Leaders at the Gothenburg Summit. Today's legislative proposal will guarantee this right in practice, and thereby responds to the first-ever successful European Citizens' Initiative, "[Right2Water](#)", that gathered 1.6 million signatures in support of improving access to safe drinking water for all Europeans. In addition, this proposal seeks to empower consumers by ensuring that water suppliers provide clearer information on consumption, cost structures and price per litre, allowing a comparison with the price of bottled water. This will contribute to the environmental goals of reducing plastic use and limiting the EU's carbon footprint, as well as meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. First Vice-President **Timmermans** and Commissioner **Vella** will present the proposal at a press conference at 12.30 CET which will be broadcast live [here](#). A [press release](#), [MEMO](#) and [factsheet](#) will be made available at the start of the press conference. *(For more information: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: + 32 229 56172; Iris Petsa – Tel.: +32 229 93321; Tim McPhie – Tel.: +32 229 58 602)*

## **The Commission launches the EU Blockchain Observatory and Forum**

The European Commission launched today the EU Blockchain Observatory and Forum with the support of the European Parliament, represented by Jakob von Weizsäcker, responsible for the recent report on virtual currencies. The Blockchain Observatory and Forum will highlight key developments of the blockchain technology, promote European actors and reinforce European engagement with multiple stakeholders involved in blockchain activities. Blockchain technologies, which store blocks of information that are distributed across the network, are seen as a major breakthrough, as they bring about high levels of traceability and security in economic transactions online. They are expected to impact digital services and transform business models in a wide range of areas, such as healthcare, insurance, finance, energy, logistics, intellectual property rights management or government services. The Commission has been funding blockchain projects through the European Union's research programmes [FP7](#) and [Horizon 2020](#) since 2013. Until 2020, it will fund projects that could draw on blockchain technologies with up to €340 million. The [press release](#) and a [factsheet](#) are available online. The press point on the EU Blockchain Observatory and Forum with Commissioner Mariya **Gabriel** and MEP Jakob von Weizsäcker from this morning can be watched on [EbS](#). *(For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Julia-Henriette Bräuer – Tel.: +32 229 80707; Inga Höglund – Tel.: +32 229 50698)*

## **Key railway connection modernised in Bulgaria thanks to Cohesion policy investments**

€471.5 million from the [Cohesion Fund](#) is invested in the development of the railway section between the towns of Elin Pelin and Kostenets, in western Bulgaria. This section is part of the high speed railway line between the two largest Bulgarian cities; Sofia, the capital, and Plovdiv, on the [Orient/East Med corridor](#) of the trans-European transport network ([TEN-T](#)). This corridor crosses eight EU countries, from Berlin to Athens, creating important rail connections in central and southern European countries, meaning smoother travels and exchanges for Bulgaria and its neighbours. Commissioner for Regional policy Corina **Crețu** said: *“Seamless railway connections for passengers and freight will boost regional development in Bulgaria, and contribute to building a competitive and low-carbon economy in the country for the next generations. I’m glad that the EU Cohesion Fund can be a part of it.”* Over €100 million from the Cohesion Fund was invested in the Sofia-Plovdiv line in the 2007-2013 funding period, to build the section between the cities of Septemvri and Plovdiv. The Kostenets-Septemvri section is currently being financed by up to €151.5 million from the Connecting Europe Facility ([CEF](#)). Once works are completed on the Sofia-Plovdiv line, passengers will be able to travel between the two cities in less than 80 minutes at speeds of up to 160 km/h. *(For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Sophie Dupin de Saint-Cyr – Tel.: +32 229 56169)*

## **The EU invests in clean and modern commuter train system in Hungary**

Almost €125.5 million from Cohesion Policy funds is invested in upgrade and electrification works on the railway line 2, linking the town of Esztergom to Hungary’s capital Budapest. The project also covers the costs of operating 12 new trains, to ensure more frequent service, and of upgraded signalling systems, to improve the traffic safety. It includes upgrading works in many of the line’s stations, for greater user comfort and smoother connections with regional bus systems, via an improved information system for passengers. *“Europe continues to invest to improve the quality of life in Hungary, and in a very concrete way,”* commented Regional Policy Commissioner Corina **Crețu**, *“This EU co-financed project will contribute to reducing car congestion, to making the air purer and to offering commuters a clean, fast and comfortable transport system.”* *(For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Sophie Dupin de Saint-Cyr – Tel.: +32 229 56169)*

## **L’Union européenne mobilise 15 millions d’euros pour Haïti**

La Commission européenne a annoncé aujourd’hui un programme d’aide de €15 millions pour la préparation aux catastrophes et le renforcement de la résilience à Haïti. *«Haïti est particulièrement vulnérable aux catastrophes naturelles et nous intensifions le soutien de l’UE pour aider à mieux préparer les populations locales. L’investissement dans la prévention et la préparation aujourd’hui pourra sauver des vies dans le futur»*, a déclaré

Christos **Stylianides**, commissaire européen chargé de l'aide humanitaire et de la gestion des crises. *“L'UE se tient aux côtés d'Haïti à travers notre soutien à la préparation aux situations d'urgence ainsi que des mesures en faveur du développement à plus long terme. Notre stratégie de réponse coordonnée aura un impact réel sur la vie de la population en assistant ceux qui en ont besoin et en améliorant leur résilience.”* a déclaré le commissaire européen à la coopération internationale et au développement, Neven **Mimica**. Ainsi, 5 millions d'euros permettront d'améliorer les capacités locales de préparation et d'intervention en cas de catastrophe dans les zones fortement exposées d'Haïti, afin de mieux anticiper et de faire face aux crises causées par la sécheresse, les cyclones, les épidémies et les inondations. Un montant supplémentaire de €10 millions sera alloué au projet “Pro-Resilience”, qui vise à améliorer les moyens de subsistance, la sécurité alimentaire et nutritionnelle des ménages les plus vulnérables. La Commission européenne fournit à la fois une aide humanitaire et une aide au développement à Haïti, qui est le principal bénéficiaire de l'aide de l'UE dans la région des Caraïbes et de l'Amérique latine. (pour plus d'informations: Carlos Martin Ruiz De Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Daniel Puglisi – Tel.: +32 229 69140; Christina Wunder – Tel.: +32 229 92256)

### **€50 million pilot project launched to support network of cybersecurity competence centres**

The Commission launched today a [call for proposals](#) for a €50 million pilot to support the creation of a network of cybersecurity competence centres across the EU. The winning consortia, including also university labs and research centres, should scale up existing research for the benefit of the cybersecurity of the Digital Single Market, with solutions that can be marketable. The experience collected in the selected projects will contribute to the design of the future competence network which will include a European Cybersecurity Research and Competence Centre. This pilot project was announced in [September 2017](#) together with a wide-ranging set of measures to equip Europe with the right tools to deal with cyber-attacks and to build strong cybersecurity in the EU. The project will be funded through the [Horizon 2020](#) Framework Programme. The call for proposals is open until 29 May 2018. Yesterday, the Commission also took another important step related to improving cybersecurity: as the Directive on security of network and information systems ([NIS Directive](#)) will have to be transposed by all Member States by 9 May, the Commission adopted an [implementing regulation](#) on digital service providers (i.e. cloud computing services, online marketplaces and search engines) and the severity of cybersecurity incidents. The NIS Directive is the first piece of EU legislation aimed at strengthening the EU's cyber-resilience. It supports the strengthening of national capabilities, establishes technical and strategic cooperation at EU level and introduces security and notification requirements. More information on the call for proposals is available [here](#) and an overview of Commission's cybersecurity actions [here](#). Further details on the transposition of the Directive on security of network and information systems can be read [here](#). (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Inga Höglund –

Tel.: +32 229 50698)

### **Fighting animal and plant diseases: €154 million earmarked for 2018**

The Commission decided to allocate about €154 million to the fight against animal diseases and infectious diseases of animals that can be transmitted to humans as well as to support survey programmes for plant pests in 2018. *“Sums awarded today show that we are taking animal and plant health very seriously. They will help Member States’ authorities to identify and act in a timely manner against outbreaks that could have a serious impact on animal and human health, economy and trade”,* said Vytenis **Andriukaitis**, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety. In the animal health area, €141 million was awarded to support the implementation of the 134 approved programmes for eradication, control and surveillance of diseases such as bovine tuberculosis, rabies, bovine brucellosis, African swine fever and lumpy skin disease. In the plant health area, the EU has committed close to €13 million for 46 plant pest survey programmes in 24 Member States in 2018, with the greatest portion of the funds going towards the fight against *Xylella fastidiosa*, one of the most dangerous plant pests in the world. See online for more information on [National Veterinary Programmes](#) and [Survey Programmes](#). (For more information: Anca Paduraru – Tel.: +32 229 91269; Aikaterini Apostola – Tel.: +32 229 87624)

### **Migration: Number of asylum applications in the EU down by 43% in 2017**

New figures published today by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) show a significant decrease in the number of asylum applications made in the EU in 2017. In total, 706,913 asylum applications were recorded in EU Member States, Norway and Switzerland in 2017, a 43% decrease compared to 2016. It marks the second consecutive year with fewer asylum applications following the unprecedented number of arrivals during the refugee crisis. Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris **Avramopoulos** said: *“The significant drop in asylum applications in 2017 is a reflection of the overall reduction in the number of arrivals to the EU. The collective efforts undertaken by the European Union over the past years to better manage migration and protect our borders are showing results. The EU will continue to be the continent of solidarity, of openness and tolerance – but we need to do this in a more manageable way, together. Today’s figures show that we are on the right path.”* EASO is also today launching an interactive portal containing information and data relating to asylum trends in the EU. More information can be found in the [press release](#) issued today. (For more information: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456; Tove Ernst – Tel.: +32 229 86764; Markus Lammert – Tel.: +32 229 80423)

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

## Future of EU finances – Commissioner Oettinger visits France and Hungary

Commissioner Günther H. **Oettinger**, in charge of Budget and Human Resources, is visiting France and Hungary on 1 and 2 February, respectively, as part of his tour across EU Member States (#MFFtour27) aimed at gathering views on the future of EU finances and the EU's multiannual budget post-2020 (#EUBudget). In France, the Commissioner will attend the European Affairs and Finance Committee at the Joint Hearing Assemblée nationale and will have a meeting with Ms Sabine Thillaye, Chairperson of the European Affairs Committee, Assemblée nationale. Commissioner Oettinger will also meet Mr Alexis Kohler, Secretary-General of the Elysée Palace, and Mr Edouard Philippe, Prime Minister, in the presence of Ms Nathalie Loiseau, Minister for European Affairs. Last but not least, he will meet Ms Mari Kiviniemi, OECD Deputy Secretary General, and Ms Josée Touchette, OECD Executive Director. In Hungary, Commissioner Oettinger will meet Mr Mihály Varga, Minister for National Economy, Mr Péter Szijjártó, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Chairperson and members of the Hungarian National Assembly's Committee on European Affairs and the Committee on Budgetary Affairs. He will also give the opening speech in a meeting on the future of cohesion policy upon invitation of Ministers responsible for cohesion policy from the so-called 'V4 + 4' countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia), together with Ms Marianne **Thyssen**, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility. Furthermore, both Commissioners will participate in a working lunch hosted by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. The Commission kicked off this debate on 28 June 2017 with the publication of its [Reflection paper on the future of EU finances](#), available in all EU languages (also in [French](#) and [Hungarian](#)). Stakeholders' views will be taken into account when preparing the next MFF, to be presented in [May 2018](#). See 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: Alexander Winterstein – Tel.: +32 229 93265; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

## Commissioner Thyssen in Hungary

Tomorrow, 2 February, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne **Thyssen** will be in Budapest, Hungary, to participate in a meeting on Cohesion Policy upon invitation of Ministers responsible for cohesion policy from the so-called 'V4 + 4' countries (Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Slovenia). The meeting will be an opportunity to discuss with the Ministers present the future of Cohesion Policy post-2020, and for the Commissioner to share her views on the future architecture of the European Social Fund (her speech will be made available [here](#)). Commissioner **Thyssen** will also meet with the Hungarian Minister for National Economy, Mr Mihály Varga, the Hungarian Minister of State of European Union Affairs, Mr Szabolcs Takács, as well as Mr Károly Cibere, Hungarian State Secretary for Social Affairs and Inclusion. (For more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: + 32 229 67094)

## **EU leads international efforts to ensure quality education for all**

Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven **Mimica**, attends the Global Partnership for Education Conference in Dakar, Senegal and calls on global leaders to step up their investment in education. Leaders from donor and developing countries are expected to commit to substantially increase their financing to accelerate progress towards achieving quality education for all. Commissioner **Mimica** said: *"I am pleased to see so many political, corporate, philanthropic and civil society leaders here in Dakar to make the Global Partnership for Education stronger. Investing in quality education is key for addressing various sustainable development challenges, including health, sustainable growth, job creation and long-term peace and stability. I proudly recall the European Union's early commitment to the GPE replenishment and invite all leaders to join us in shaping a better future while leaving no one behind."* The EU's announcement in December 2017 to replenish the Global Partnership for Education with an [additional €100 million](#) is a clear sign of EU's determination to help ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and to promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, thus contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals achievement. More information in the [press release](#). (For more information: Carlos Martin Ruiz De Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Christina Wunder – Tel.: +32 229 92256)

## **Le Commissaire Moscovici en visite ce vendredi en Bretagne, France**

Pierre **Moscovici**, Commissaire pour les affaires économiques et financières, la fiscalité et les douanes, est en visite en Bretagne, France, demain le vendredi 2 février. Il commencera sa visite par la visite du chantier du métro de Rennes, financé par des fonds européens (Feder et prêt de la BEI) puis se rendra à la plateforme Excelcar, espace d'innovation collaborative de l'industrie automobile au service de l'emploi local, où il échangera avec les responsables de PME et de start-ups de cette plateforme, originaires de toute la Bretagne. En fin de matinée, il donnera une conférence de presse conjointe avec le Président de région, Loïg Chesnais-Girard. Elle sera suivie d'un [dialogue citoyen](#) intitulé "Europe-Bretagne : un destin économique commun ?" à 14h15. Ce dialogue sera [diffusé via Facebook live](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Vanessa Mock – Tel.: [+32 229 56194](#); Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: [+32 229 58615](#); Enda McNamara – Tel.: [+32 229 64976](#))

## **Vytenis Andriukaitis, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety on official visit to Norway**

On 1-2 February Vytenis **Andriukaitis**, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety will pay an official visit to Norway. On Thursday, Commissioner **Andriukaitis** will hold a bilateral meeting with Mr Bent Høie, Minister of Health and Care Services and Ms Åse Michaelsen, Minister for the Elderly and Public Health. On Friday, he will meet Mr Jon Georg Dale, Minister of Agriculture and Food to discuss chronic wasting disease (CWD). The Commissioner will meet

Norwegian European Reference Networks (ERN) participants to talk about Norwegian experience with the ERN cooperation. He will also attend the presentation of the Norwegian priorities in the area of eHealth. Later that day, together with Minister Høie he will attend the official event that marks the accreditation of Norway's team as part of Health Emergency Medical Teams coordinated by the European Union. *"Lessons learnt from Ebola and Zika clearly show the need for Europe to be more proactive and better prepared. Therefore I am particularly pleased that Norway's government is committed to developing an emergency medical team ready for deployment whenever needed. I am looking forward to learning more about it during my visit"*, said Commissioner **Andriukaitis** ahead of his visit. (For more information: Anca Paduraru – Tel.: +32 229 91269; Aikaterini Apostola – Tel.: +32 229 87624)

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