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Commission welcomes the entry into force of new rules to prevent tax evasion and money laundering

The Commission has welcomed the entry into force of new rules obliging Member States to give tax authorities access to data collected under anti-money laundering legislation. As of 1 January 2018, national tax authorities will have direct access to information on the beneficial owners of companies, trusts and other entities, as well as customer due diligence records of companies. The new arrangements should give a major boost to tax authorities in the fight against the types of structures highlighted in the 'Paradise Papers'. Pierre Moscovici, Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs, said: *"We want to give tax authorities crucial information on the individuals behind any company or trust. This is essential for them to be able to identify and clamp down on tax evaders. To do this, tax authorities will now have access to anti-money laundering information."* The new amended rules, enshrined in the Directive on Administrative Cooperation ([Directive 2011/16/EU](#)), will give tax authorities much-needed access and enable them to react quickly and efficiently to cases of tax evasion and avoidance. (For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Patrick McCullough – Tel.: +32 229 87183)

2018 European Capitals of Culture: Leeuwarden and Valletta

From 1 January, [Leeuwarden](#) (The Netherlands) and [Valletta](#) (Malta) will hold the title of European Capital of Culture for one year. The opening celebrations for Valletta will take place from 14 to 20 January across the city, inspired by the traditional Maltese *festa* (village feast). Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Tibor **Navracsics**, will attend the official opening ceremony on 20 January. In Leeuwarden, celebrations will kick off on 26 and 27 January, with artistic installations and performances by professional and amateur artists across the city, and museums opening their doors to visitors throughout the Friesland region. European Commission First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans** will attend the official opening ceremony on 27 January. Commissioner **Navracsics** said: *"The European Capitals of Culture help bring communities together through culture with long-lasting benefits for the respective cities, their citizens and their economies. 2018 will be a special year as it is the European Year of Cultural Heritage, and both Capitals have included many projects promoting cultural heritage in their programmes – contributing to highlighting the role of culture in building a European identity. I wish Leeuwarden and Valletta every success for the coming year."* The European Capital of Culture was initiated by the then Greek Minister of Culture Melina Mercouri in 1985 and has become one of the most high-profile cultural initiatives in Europe. The cities are selected on the basis of a cultural programme that must include a strong European dimension, promote the participation and involvement of the city's inhabitants and contribute to the long-term development of the city and its surrounding region. A full press release is available [online](#). (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Joseph Waldstein –

Tel.: +32 229 56184)

Novel Food: new regulation adding to the food variety present on the EU market enters into force

The new [Regulation](#) on Novel Food is applicable from 1 January 2018. The regulation brings significant improvements and changes to the novel food authorisation procedure. It includes an expanded definition for novel food to account for innovation and technology advances in the food sector, a centralised EU-wide authorisation system of novel foods and of traditional foods from third countries, a list of all authorised novel foods in the EU, and data protection provisions for the applicants. European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety Vytenis **Andriukaitis** welcomed the new regulation: *"These changes will make the process of authorising and placing novel food on the European market simpler, quicker and more applicant friendly, while fully ensuring food safety. We hope that this will add to the variety already present on the EU market of healthy, nutritious traditional and innovative foods."* Before being authorised all novel foods must be scientifically proven to be safe to public health. The authorisation then sets out the conditions for their use, their designation as food and labelling requirements. For more information on the new Novel Food Regulation see [here](#). (For more information: Anca Paduraru – Tel.: +32 229 91269; Aikaterini Apostola – Tel.: +32 229 87624)

Aides d'État: la Commission approuve un régime français d'aides d'État en faveur de l'infrastructure ferroviaire pour le transport de marchandises

La Commission a autorisé, en vertu des règles de l'UE relatives aux aides d'État, un régime d'aides français en faveur de la création et de la modernisation d'installations terminales embranchées (ITE). Le régime est doté d'un budget global de 60 millions d'euros avec l'aide prenant la forme de subventions non remboursables. L'objet du régime est de soutenir le financement partiel de la construction, de la rénovation, de l'extension et de la remise en service d'embranchements ferroviaires privés pour le transport de marchandises. Une installation terminale embranchée privée est une voie ferrée dont le propriétaire est une entreprise commerciale, qui l'utilise pour distribuer ou réceptionner des chargements. Les embranchements ferroviaires permettent la desserte ferroviaire directe des sites d'activité économique et évitent les ruptures de charges qui se manifestent par un stockage temporaire ou un transbordement des marchandises sur un site intermédiaire. La Commission a estimé que la mesure favorise le transfert du fret de la route vers le rail, en accord avec les objectifs de la politique commune des transports visant à encourager les modes de transport moins polluant. Par conséquent, la Commission a conclu que la mesure respecte la réglementation de l'UE en matière d'aides d'État. Plus d'informations seront disponibles dans le [registre des aides d'État](#) sur le [site internet de la DG Concurrence](#) sous le numéro [SA.48483](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Lucía Caudet – Tel. +32 229 56182; Maria Sarantopoulou – Tel.: +32 229 13740)

Declaration by the High Representative / Vice-President Moghernini on behalf

of the EU on the situation in Iran

Yesterday the following [Declaration](#) was issued: *“The European Union is closely following the ongoing demonstrations in Iran, the increase of violence and the unacceptable loss of human lives. For the EU, human rights have always been a core issue in our relationship with Iran. Peaceful demonstration and freedom of expression are fundamental rights that apply to every country, and Iran is no exception. In the last days, we have been in touch with the Iranian authorities. In the spirit of frankness and respect that is at the basis of our relationship, we expect all concerned to refrain from violence and the right of expression to be guaranteed, also in light of the statements made by the Iranian Government. The European Union will continue to monitor the situation.”* (For more information: Catherine Ray – Tel.: +32 229 69921; Carlos Martin Ruiz de Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Lauranne Devillé – Tel.: +32 229 80833)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

High Representative / Vice President on official visit in Cuba

The High Representative / Vice President Federica **Mogherini** will travel to Cuba on 3-4 January, reconfirming the strong EU-Cuban relationship. During her visit, she will meet with government representatives, with a view to an ambitious and swift joint implementation of the Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement (PDCA) between the EU and Cuba. Together with Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez Parrilla she will also prepare for the first EU-Cuba Joint Council meeting at ministerial level within the framework of the PDCA. The Political Dialogue and Cooperation Agreement entered into provisional application on 1 November 2017. This landmark agreement – the first ever between the EU and Cuba – constitutes the new legal framework for EU-Cuba relations. It foresees an enhanced political dialogue, improved bilateral cooperation and the development of joint action in multilateral fora. (For more information: Catherine Ray – Tel.: +32 229 69921; Daniel Puglisi – Tel.: +32 229-69140)

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