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European Commission takes next step in Article 50 process by recommending draft negotiating directives

The College of Commissioners has today sent a recommendation to the Council to open the Article 50 negotiations with the United Kingdom. It includes draft negotiating directives. This legal mandate follows the adoption on Saturday by the European Council of political guidelines. Today's text complements the guidelines and provides the necessary details to conduct the first phase of the negotiations. This reflects the two-phased approach established by the European Council and prioritises those matters which are necessary to ensure an orderly withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the Union. Today's recommendation will be sent to the Council, where it is set to be adopted by the General Affairs Council on 22 May. A full press release is available [here](#). (For more information: Margaritis Schinas – Tel.: +32 229 60524; Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 229 91382; Daniel Ferrie: +32 229 86500)

Eurobarometer survey shows overwhelming public support for EU role in emergency response

The European Commission has published today the results of the Eurobarometer survey of public attitudes to the European Union's role in emergency response. 88% of respondents felt it important that the EU fund humanitarian aid activities and 90% said it was important that the EU help to coordinate the response to disasters in the EU through its civil protection role. *"The 2017 results show a continuing and overwhelming level of public support for EU action on humanitarian aid and civil protection. The European Union is a global humanitarian leader. When a disaster hits, there are no borders and the public support the EU helping in emergency response both at home and abroad. I am determined that the Commission will continue to deliver on this vote of confidence by European citizens"*, said Christos **Stylianides**, Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management. The survey also shows that most EU citizens (56%) do not think their own country has sufficient means to deal with all major disasters on their own. For further details, see the [press release](#). (For more information: Carlos Martin Ruiz de Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Daniel Puglisi: +32 2 296 91 40).

State Aid: Commission approves aid to inland waterway transport in Slovakia

The European Commission has endorsed a Slovak scheme to support inland waterway transportation by exempting all commercial operators from paying excise duty on fuel for inland waterway boats. The aim of the measure is to boost the shift of freight traffic in Slovakia from road to inland waterways. Supporting a mode of transport that is less polluting than road will have a positive impact on the environment. The aid scheme will cover a period of 10 years with a budget of approximately €38.4 million. The Commission concluded that the scheme will promote a sustainable shift from road to inland waterway transport in line with EU state aid rules. More information will be available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the [public case](#)

[register](#) under the case number SA.46046. (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Yizhou Ren – Tel.: +32 229 94889)

Eurostat: Estimation rapide préliminaire pour le premier trimestre 2017 – Le PIB en hausse de 0,5% dans la zone euro et de 0,4% dans l’UE28: +1,7% et +1,9% respectivement par rapport au premier trimestre 2016

Au cours du premier trimestre 2017, le PIB corrigé des variations saisonnières a augmenté de 0,5% dans la zone euro (ZE19) et de 0,4% dans l’UE28 par rapport au trimestre précédent, selon l’estimation rapide préliminaire publiée par Eurostat, l’office statistique de l’Union européenne. Au cours du quatrième trimestre 2016, le PIB avait progressé de 0,5% dans la zone euro et de 0,6% dans l’UE28. En comparaison avec le même trimestre de l’année précédente, le PIB corrigé des variations saisonnières a enregistré une hausse de 1,7% dans la zone euro et de 1,9% dans l’UE28 au premier trimestre 2017, après +1,8% et +1,9% au quatrième trimestre 2016. Un communiqué de presse est disponible [ici](#). (Pour plus d’informations: Annika Breidhardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153; Juliana Dahl – Tel.: +32 229 59914)

Eurostat: Les prix à la production industrielle en baisse de 0,3% dans la zone euro – En baisse de 0,2% dans l’UE28

En mars 2017 par rapport à février 2017, les prix à la production industrielle ont diminué de 0,3% dans la zone euro (ZE19) et de 0,2% dans l’UE28, selon les estimations d’Eurostat, l’office statistique de l’Union européenne. En février 2017, les prix étaient restés stables dans les deux zones. En mars 2017 par rapport à mars 2016, les prix à la production industrielle ont augmenté de 3,9% dans la zone euro et de 4,6% dans l’UE28. Un communiqué de presse est disponible [ici](#). (Pour plus d’informations: Lucia Caudet – Tel.: + 32 229 56182; Maud Noyon – Tel.: +32 229 80379; Mirna Talko – Tel.: +32 229 87278)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Vice-President Šefčovič on second Energy Union Tour to Belgium

On 4 May, Vice-President for Energy Union Maroš Šefčovič will bring the second Energy Union Tour to Belgium. Vice-President Šefčovič will hold a ministerial meeting with the Belgian Federal and Regional Energy Ministers of Energy. Belgium’s long-term energy and climate vision will be at the heart of the discussion. The Vice-President will also engage with Members of the different Parliaments, together with civil society stakeholders, in the Federal Parliament for a debate on the implementation of the EU’s 2030 energy and climate framework, the Energy Union governance (including the preparation of the Integrated [National Energy and Climate Plans](#)) and the Commission’s [Clean Energy for All Europeans](#) package from November 2016. In Antwerp,

Šefčovič will take part in the [Citizens Dialogue](#) “How the EU can finance cities to become smart cities?” and delivers a key note. Ahead of the visit, Vice-President **Šefčovič** said: “Europe is forging ahead with the clean energy transition. Whether it is with politicians, energy stakeholders or citizens, I look forward to discussing how it can be best driven in Belgium. The Energy Union is more than energy and climate alone. It is about accelerating the fundamental modernisation of Europe’s entire economy, making it low-carbon, energy and resource efficient, in a socially fair manner. In this context, I particularly welcome on-going efforts by Belgian leaders to join forces for a Belgian Energy Pact”. Upcoming dates and more information on the 2017 Energy Union tour are available [here](#). More information on Energy Union is available [here](#). (For more information: Anna-Kaisa Itkonen – Tel.: +32 229 56186; Nicole Bockstaller – Tel.: +32 229 52589)

Commissioner Avramopoulos in Beijing

Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris **Avramopoulos** will be in Beijing, China, on Thursday and Friday (4-5 May) where, among others, he will meet with the Chinese State Councilor and Minister of Public Security Guo Shengkun. In Beijing, the Commissioner will officially launch the parallel negotiation for an EU-China visa facilitation agreement as well as an EU-China agreement for the cooperation on illegal migration. He will also more broadly discuss the perspectives of EU-China cooperation on security and migration issues. A press conference will take place tomorrow at 17:00 (local time) and will be available on [EBS](#). On Friday, Commissioner **Avramopoulos** will deliver a lecture on “EU-China partnership in a world of mobility and global security challenges” at the Peking University. (For more information: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456 ; Katarzyna Kolanko – Tel.: +32 229 63444)

Commission appoints new Deputy Head of the European Political Strategy Centre

Today, the Commission appointed former Romanian Defence Minister Mihnea Motoc as Deputy Head of the Commission’s in-house think tank, the European Political Strategy Centre. He will in particular work on the Commission’s European Security and Defence priorities. Mihnea Motoc has had a distinguished career in Romania’s diplomatic service and government, most recently as Romania’s Minister of National Defence. In light of his vast experience and strong network in Brussels and across Europe, Mihnea Motoc will provide valuable strategic advice to President Jean-Claude **Juncker** and the relevant Members of the College. He will join the European Political Strategy Centre on 16 May, in time to contribute to the up-coming Commission Reflection Paper on the future of European defence. Making Europe a stronger global actor when it comes to security and defence matters is one of President Jean-Claude Juncker’s [Political Priorities](#). For further details, see full press release in [EN](#), [FR](#), [DE](#) and [RO](#). (For more information: Alexander Winterstein – Tel.: +32 229 93265)

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