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EU-U.S. Joint Statement of 25 July: European Union imports of U.S. liquefied natural gas (LNG) are on the rise

In their [Joint Statement](#) of 25 July in Washington D.C., President **Juncker** and President Trump agreed to strengthen EU-U.S. strategic cooperation with respect to energy. In this context, the European Union would import more liquefied natural gas from the United States to diversify and render its energy supply more secure. The EU and the U.S. will therefore work to facilitate trade in liquefied natural gas. European Commission President Jean-Claude **Juncker** said: *"The European Union is ready to facilitate more imports of liquefied natural gas from the U.S. and this is already the case as we speak. The growing exports of U.S. liquefied natural gas, if priced competitively, could play an increasing and strategic role in EU gas supply; but the U.S. needs to play its role in doing away with red tape restrictions on liquefied natural gas exports. Both sides have much to gain by working together in the energy field."* Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy, Miguel **Arias Cañete**, said: *"Diversification is an important element for ensuring the security of gas supply in the EU. Increasing imports of competitively priced liquefied natural gas from the U.S. is therefore to be welcomed. This is happening at a time when EU indigenous gas production is declining more rapidly than foreseen and there is an accelerated phase-out of coal power plants in the EU."* A press release is available [online](#). (For more information: Mina Alexandrova Andreeva – Tel.: +32 229 91382; Anna-Kaisa Itkonen – Tel.: +32 229 56186; Iris Petsa – Tel.: +32 229 93321)

Pologne: la politique régionale améliore la sécurité routière en Basse Silésie

68.8 millions d'euros du Fonds européen de développement régional (FEDER) permettront de construire une nouvelle rocade sur la route nationale DK35, près de la ville de Wałbrzych. *"Ce projet améliorera la sécurité routière en fluidifiant le trafic,"* a déclaré la Commissaire à la politique régionale Corina **Crețu**. *"Il permettra un accès plus rapide au centre de Wałbrzych, ce qui améliorera la qualité de la vie des habitants et créera des nouvelles opportunités économiques pour toute la Basse Silésie."* Le projet, actuellement en construction, devrait être achevé en décembre 2020. (Pour plus d'informations: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Sophie Dupin de Saint-Cyr – Tel.: +32 229 56169)

Commission supports reforms in Bulgaria

Today, the Commission adopted a decision approving additional requests from Bulgaria for technical support through the [Structural Reform Support Programme](#) (SRSP). The projects financed by today's decision focus on reforms in the area of insolvency, with accompanying measures to reinforce the judicial infrastructure and the corporate governance of State-Owned

Enterprises. The projects will be financed from Bulgaria's voluntary transfer of €1.5 million from their technical assistance component under the European Structural and Investment Funds to the SRSP. The Work Programme annexed to the decision outlines the actions that will be financed and sets out the priorities, objectives and expected results of the reform projects. These reforms are also relevant in view of preparing a smooth transition to Exchange Rate Mechanism II. The Bulgarian authorities have [committed](#) to implement a number of prior commitments in the context of an expectation to join ERM II and Banking Union by July 2019. The Commission created the [Structural Reform Support Service](#) (SRSS) in 2015 to support Member States in the preparation, design and implementation of institutional, structural and administrative reforms. SRSS manages the [Structural Reform Support Programme](#), available to all EU Member States upon their request. *(For more information Christian Spahr – Tel.: +32 229 5005; Annikky Lamp – Tel.: +32 229 56151)*

The Gambia signs the region-to-region Economic Partnership Agreement between West Africa and the EU

The Gambia became today the 14th West African country to have signed the region-to-region Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the EU. The aim of this tailor-made agreement is to promote trade between the EU and African states and contribute to sustainable development and poverty reduction. Once signed by all 16 partners, including Nigeria and Mauritania, the Agreement will be submitted for ratification. Meanwhile, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana have already opted for stepping stone agreements that will in future be replaced by the regional EPA with West Africa. On 26 October 2018 a Joint EU-ACP (African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States) Ministerial Committee on Trade will take place in Brussels to discuss the state of play of the seven Economic Partnership Agreements between the EU and countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. The EU is the world's most open market for African exports. See the [factsheet](#) for more information about EU trade with Africa and dedicated pages for specific information about [West Africa](#) and the [Economic Partnership Agreements](#). *(For more information: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: + 32 229 56172; Kinga Malinowska – Tel: +32 229 51383)*

EU funding to help 14 top-class innovative projects enter the market faster

The European Commission will support 14 top-class projects to bring their innovations faster onto the market under the Fast Track to Innovation scheme of the [European Innovation Council \(EIC\) pilot](#). Projects selected for funding include a recycling technology to introduce rubber from 'end-of-life' tyres into production lines, a system to treat persistent atrial fibrillation, and an artificial intelligence tool that improves video quality and limits internet traffic in video streaming. The Fast Track to Innovation scheme targets radically new, breakthrough products, services, processes or business models that open up new markets. It offers up to €3 million per project to consortia composed of 3 to 5 partners including small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), industrial participants, research centers, universities, and other actors as incubators, investors, and the public sector. The scheme

is for relatively mature groundbreaking technologies, concepts and business models that are close to the market. The participants also have access to free [business coaching and acceleration services](#). The 14 beneficiary projects involve 59 partners, including SMEs, industrial partners, universities and non-profit organisations, from 18 countries. You can find more information, including names of projects and countries, and amount of funding, in a [press release](#) and the [map of beneficiaries](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maud Noyon – Tel.: +32 229 80379)

State aid: Commission concludes tax on admission fees to public and private casinos in Greece from 1995 to 2012 does not involve State aid

The European Commission has concluded that the system of levies on admission fees applied by casinos in Greece until November 2012 does not constitute State aid within the meaning of EU rules. Since 1995 all casinos in Greece have been required to charge a regulated admission fee to customers. Casinos then have to pass on 80% of the admission fee to the Greek State as a tax, while retaining the remaining 20% as remuneration for issuing tickets and covering expenses. Until November 2012, the general regulated admission fee was €15. However, state-owned casinos were subject to a lower regulated admission fee of €6. Following a complaint by a private casino operator, the Commission opened a formal investigation into the differentiated tax levied on admissions to public and private casinos in Greece. In [May 2011](#), the Commission found that the measure constituted incompatible State aid in favour of public casinos, and ordered Greece to recover the unlawful aid. This Commission decision was overturned by the General Court in [September 2014](#). The European Court of Justice confirmed the General Court's judgment in [October 2015](#). Today, the Commission has adopted a new decision, in line with the findings of the European courts. The Commission has concluded that the differentiated tax levied on admissions to public casinos and private casinos did not confer a selective advantage to public casinos. This is because the amounts due to be paid to the Greek State by private and public casinos corresponded to the same percentage (80%) of the different regulated admission fees charged to customers by the two categories of casinos. In November 2012, the differentiation between admission fees for private and public casinos in Greece was abolished and a €6 admission fee set for all casinos. More information will be available on the Commission's [competition website](#), in the [State Aid Register](#) under the case number [SA.28973](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Giulia Astuti – Tel: +32 229 55344).

State aid: Commission approves prolongation of Portuguese Guarantee Scheme on EIB lending

The European Commission has approved, under EU State aid rules, a prolongation of a Portuguese guarantee scheme on European Investment Bank (EIB) lending until 9 February 2019. The scheme covers State guarantees to banks that guarantee EIB loans granted to companies in Portugal. The Commission found the prolongation of the scheme to be in line with its [2013 Banking Communication](#) because it is well targeted, proportionate and limited in time and scope. It was [initially approved in June 2013](#) and prolonged several times, the last time [in November 2017](#). The prolonged scheme will

allow the continuation of funding provided by the EIB to the real economy and prevent the disruption of the credit granted by the EIB through the banks participating in the scheme. More information will be available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the public [case register](#) under the reference SA.51041. *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Giulia Astuti – Tel: +32 229 55344).*

State aid: Commission approves prolongation of Portuguese guarantee scheme for credit institutions

The European Commission has authorised, under EU State aid rules, the prolongation of a guarantee scheme for credit institutions in Portugal until 9 February 2019. The credit institutions can access the scheme under certain conditions should the need arise. The Commission found the extension of the measure to be in line with its [2013 Banking Communication](#), according to which the Commission can authorise schemes providing for liquidity measures for banks, which do not have a capital shortfall. The scheme [was initially approved in October 2008](#) and prolonged several times, the [last time in November 2017](#). The Commission approved the prolongation of the scheme because the measure is well targeted, proportionate and limited in time and scope. In line with the 2013 Banking Communication, the Commission is authorising guarantee schemes on banks' liabilities for periods of six months. Each prolongation is based on a review of the developments in financial markets and the scheme's effectiveness. More information will be available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the public [case register](#) under the reference SA.51042. *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Giulia Astuti – Tel: +32 229 55344).*

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of joint control over Optimizd by DNB Bank and Orkla

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of joint control over newly created joint venture Optimizd AS by DNB Bank ASA and Orkla ASA, all of Norway. Optimizd AS will facilitate data driven marketing through own-channel marketing and purchased media placements, as well as by conducting analysis of data for marketing use. DNB Bank provides banking and insurance services to retail customers, corporate clients and the public sector. Orkla is a supplier of branded consumer goods to the grocery, out-of-home, specialised retail, pharmacy and bakery sectors. The Commission concluded that the acquisition would raise no competition concerns since Optimizd will have negligible activities within the European Economic Area. 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.9021](#). *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Giulia Astuti – Tel: +32 229 55344).*

Concentrations : la Commission autorise l'acquisition de WFS par le groupe Cerberus

La Commission européenne a approuvé, en vertu du règlement européen sur les concentrations, l'acquisition de WFS Global Holding S.A.S basée en France par Promontoria Holding 264 B.V., basée aux Pays-Bas, appartenant au groupe Cerberus, basé aux Etats-Unis. WFS est active dans la manutention de fret aérien et l'assistance technique au sol (avions, passagers, bagages). Le groupe Cerberus est un fonds d'investissement. La Commission a conclu que la concentration envisagée ne soulèverait pas de problème de concurrence, dans la mesure où les deux entreprises ne sont pas actives sur le même marché ou sur des marchés liés ou complémentaires. La transaction a été examinée dans le cadre de la procédure simplifiée de contrôle des concentrations. De plus amples informations sont disponibles sur le [site internet concurrence](#) de la Commission, dans le [registre public](#) des affaires sous le numéro d'affaire [M.9018](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Giulia Astuti – +32 229 55344)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini paid official visit to Australia

On 8 August, Federica **Mogherini** visited Australia for the first time in her capacity as High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission. While in Sydney, she met with Julie Bishop, Foreign Minister of Australia. They discussed bilateral issues, such as the recently launched negotiations on a comprehensive [trade agreement](#) and the progress made in implementing the EU-Australia Framework Agreement [signed in 2017](#). They looked at the positive impact the cooperation between the EU and Australia has, with a view to protecting and strengthening the international rules-based order, multilateralism and open global trade. Australia confirmed that it will deploy civilian expertise to EU-led crisis response and capacity building missions in third countries of common interest, under the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy. They agreed to continue strengthening security coordination and collaboration in the Indo-Pacific region, including through development cooperation. Minister Bishop emphasised that the EU's presence and development programs in the region are significantly improving the quality of peoples' lives through sustainable social and economic development. They also discussed ways to further enhance collaboration in combating terrorism, strengthen cooperation on cyber issues, as well as global challenges, such as climate change and migration. The High Representative/Vice-President and the Foreign Minister [spoke to the press](#) after their meeting and issued a [joint press release](#). Federica **Mogherini** also met with Sir Peter Cosgrove, Governor General of the Commonwealth of Australia, and delivered an [opening speech](#) at the Europe-Australia Business Council. For more information on EU-Australia relations, consult the [factsheet](#) or visit the [website](#) of the EU delegation to Australia. (For more information: Carlos Martin – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Esther Osorio – Tel.: +32 229 62076; Judith Hebekeuser: +32 229 52656)

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