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Visit of the College of Commissioners to Sofia: Bulgarian Presidency begins with €100 million Juncker Plan loan for agri-pharma business Huvepharma

Yesterday evening President **Juncker** and the College participated in the opening ceremony of the Bulgarian Presidency of the EU, with Prime Minister Borissov, President Radev, Minister in charge of the Bulgarian Presidency Lilyana Pavlova, President Tusk and President Tajani. President **Juncker** delivered a [speech](#) in which he said: *“You can count on us (...) because your place is in Europe. And your place is in Schengen. And your place is in the euro. We will work for that. The Commission will be by Bulgaria’s side: united we stand strong and united we will stand.”* (watch the [opening ceremony on EbS+](#)) The ceremony was followed by a working dinner, hosted by President Borissov. The visit of the College of Commissioners continues today. This morning President **Juncker** and Prime Minister Borissov witnessed the signing of a new European Investment Bank (EIB) loan of €100 million with Bulgarian agri-pharma business Huvepharma to finance a boost in production levels and research and development (R&D) in the area of animal health. The loan is guaranteed by the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), the central pillar of the Investment Plan for Europe, the Juncker Plan. The deal was signed by Commission Vice-President Jyrki **Katainen**, Agriculture Minister of Bulgaria Rumen Porodzanov, EIB Vice-President Andrew McDowell and Kiril Domuschiev, Chief Executive Officer of Biovet’s parent company Huvepharma. (For more information about the EFSI project and the latest Investment Plan results see the [Investment Plan website](#)). Speaking about the deal in his press conference with Prime Minister Borissov this morning, President **Juncker** said: *“This will not only create 200 jobs locally but will also reinforce Europe’s leading position in the global animal health sector. To me this not only shows this country’s potential but it shows that Bulgaria is a leader in Europe.”* President **Juncker** also underlined the importance of the upcoming Bulgarian Presidency in the delivery on our [Roadmap for a more united, stronger and more democratic Union](#), and in finding consensus in the ongoing legislative proposals. On Bulgaria’s prospects of joining the euro, President Juncker said: *“Bulgaria is on the right track. Government debt is, with clearly below 30%, one of the lowest of the European Union and of the eurozone, budget deficit is an unknown term in this country, unemployment is falling, which also shows that bigger improvements have been made concerning real convergence in Bulgaria. (...) I am of the opinion that Bulgaria should join the ERMII as quickly as possible.”* (For more information: Margaritis Schinas – Tel.: +32 229 60524; Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 229 91382; Annika Breidhardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153; Siobhán Millbright – Tel.: +32 229 57361)

Payment services: Consumers to benefit from cheaper, safer and more innovative electronic payments

The revised Payment Services Directive (PSD2), which will apply as of 13 January 2018, aims to modernise Europe’s payment services to the benefit of

both consumers and businesses, so as to keep pace with this rapidly evolving market. Valdis **Dombrovskis**, Vice-President responsible for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union said. *“This legislation is another step towards a digital single market in the EU. It will promote the development of innovative online and mobile payments, which will benefit the economy and growth. With PSD2 becoming applicable, we are banning surcharges for consumer debit and credit card payments. This could save more than €550 million per year for EU consumers. Consumers will also be better protected when they make payments.”* The new rules will be applicable as of 13 January 2018 through provisions that Member States have introduced in their national laws in compliance with the EU legislation. The Commission calls on Member States who have not yet transposed the Directive, to do so as a matter of urgency. For more information please see the full [press release](#) and [MEMO](#) available online (*For more information: Vanessa Mock – Tel.: +32 229 56194; Letizia Lupini – Tel.: +32 229 51958*)

Next steps against fake news: High-Level Expert Group to tackle disinformation meets for the first time

As announced in [November 2017](#), the [High-Level Expert Group](#) appointed to advise the European Commission on how to tackle the spread of online disinformation will meet for the first time next Monday 15 January at 10:00. The High-Level Expert Group will contribute to the development of an EU-level strategy on how to tackle this phenomenon, to be presented in spring 2018. Following the Commission’s call for application last November, the Commission received over 300 applications for the group. The experts will advise the Commission on scoping the phenomenon, defining the roles and responsibilities of relevant stakeholders, grasping the international dimension, taking stock of the positions at stake, and formulating recommendations. The selection of members ensures a wide participation of expertise, a balanced geographical representation, gender balance, and a balanced view of both social media platforms and media organisations, civil society organisation and experts such as journalists and academia. The procedure has followed the usual rules for selection of expert groups of the Commission. The final list of participants can be found [here](#). Mandated by President **Juncker**, Commissioner Mariya **Gabriel** launched the initiative in November 2017 together with a [public consultation](#) open until 23 February. On Monday 15 January, she will hold a press point at 11:00 which can be followed live on [EbS](#). In establishing the group, the Commission has worked closely with the [EEAS East Stratcom Task Force](#), which was set up by the High Representative/Vice-President Federica **Mogherini** in 2015 to address disinformation activities by external actors. You can find more information about the High-Level Expert Group’s work [here](#), as well as in a [press release](#) and in Commissioner **Gabriel’s speech**. (*For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Inga Höglund – Tel.: +32 229 50698; Julia-Henriette Bräuer – Tel.: +32 229 80707*)

New opportunities for Europe’s leading innovators in the fields of Added-Value Manufacturing and Urban Mobility

Today, the [European Institute of Innovation and Technology \(EIT\)](#) is launching a Call for the creation of two new Knowledge and Innovation Communities: EIT

Manufacturing and EIT Urban Mobility. The former will contribute to the development of a more sustainable and environmentally-friendly manufacturing process in the industrial sector. The latter will focus on smart, green and integrated transport. The two new pan-European partnerships of universities, research organisations and businesses will join the six existing Knowledge and Innovation Communities on climate (*EIT Climate-KIC*), digitisation (*EIT Digital*), food (*EIT Food*), health (*EIT Health*), renewable energy (*EIT InnoEnergy*), and raw materials (*EIT Raw Materials*). They will help to boost innovation in strategic sectors where Europe needs to build and maintain a competitive advantage. Tibor **Navracsics**, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, responsible for the EIT, said: *“The EIT Knowledge and Innovation Communities are part of Europe’s answer to the global challenges our societies face. It is only by innovating, investing in talent and developing solutions that we will be able to build resilient, sustainable and inclusive societies. Therefore I am looking forward to welcoming the new Knowledge and Innovation Communities in the fields of added-value manufacturing and urban mobility.”* Read the EIT’s press release [here](#). The EIT is an independent EU body set up to boost innovation and entrepreneurship across Europe – more details are available [here](#). (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Joseph Waldstein – Tel.: +32 229 56184; Julia-Henriette Bräuer – Tel.: +32 229 80707)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of the Chapelfield Partnership by intu and LaSalle Investment Management

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of joint control over the Chapelfield Partnership LP by intu properties plc (“intu”) and LaSalle Investment Management (“LaSalle”), all of the UK. The Chapelfield Partnership, currently indirectly wholly owned by intu, owns and operates the Chapelfield Shopping Centre in Norwich, UK. intu is a real estate investment trust, largely focused on shopping centre ownership, management and development across the UK and, to a lesser extent, in Spain. LaSalle – a subsidiary of Jones Lang LaSalle Incorporated of the US – is a real estate investment management firm. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns given the companies’ moderate combined market positions in the provision of real estate services in the UK resulting from the proposed transaction. 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.8720](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Sarantopoulou – Tel.: +32 229 13740)

La Commission lance un appel à propositions pour les nouvelles campagnes de promotions des produits agro-alimentaires européens

Un appel à propositions pour une nouvelle campagne de promotion des produits agro-alimentaires de l’Union européenne s’ouvre aujourd’hui avec un budget de près de €170 million, en nette augmentation par rapport aux €142 million disponibles l’année dernière. Deux tiers de la somme seront utilisés pour promouvoir les produits de l’UE à travers le monde et à trouver de nouveaux

marchés, en ciblant principalement des pays tiers à fort potentiel de croissance. Le Commissaire à l'agriculture Phil **Hogan** a dit: "l'UE est le plus grand exportateur de produits agro-alimentaires et la référence mondiale en ce qui concerne les produits alimentaires de haute qualité. J'ai eu l'occasion de constater de mes propres yeux l'intérêt des consommateurs et des entreprises pour les produits agroalimentaires de l'UE dans le cadre de mes nombreuses missions commerciales à l'étranger. Je me réjouis de ces nouveaux programmes de promotion qui, par le passé, ont ouvert la voie à de nouveaux candidats et ont accru notre visibilité dans le monde entier." Au sein du territoire de l'Union, l'accent sera mis sur les labels de qualité existants: label bio, IGP, AOP, et sur les campagnes visant à promouvoir la consommation de fruits et légumes. Les organisations de producteurs et associations sectorielles peuvent envoyer leurs propositions [via un portail dédié](#) jusqu'au 12 avril. Un communiqué de presse dans toutes les langues est disponible [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'information: Daniel Rosario – Tel: +32 2 29 56185; Clémence Robin – Tel: +32 229 52 509)

Agriculture: the Commission approves new geographical indication from the Netherlands

The Commission has approved today the addition of a new product from The Netherlands to the quality register of Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG). '[Suikerstroop](#)' is dark brown syrup made of the syrupy liquid left behind during the production of sugar from sugar beet or sugar cane. It has a sweet taste due to its large sugar content (at least 70%) but is also a bit salty due to the minerals and other components from the sugar beet or sugar cane found in the syrup as a result of the production process. Historically, 'suikerstroop' is a by-product of sugar refining and it has been a much-used ingredient in traditional Dutch dishes, such as Groningse kruidkoek or Limburgse zoervleisj. A sauce made out of 'suikerstroop' called stroopsaus is also a recommended accompaniment for many traditional dishes. The scheme for traditional specialities guaranteed is to help the producers of traditional products to communicate to consumers the value-adding attributes of their product. A name can be registered as a traditional speciality guaranteed where it describes a specific product or foodstuff that results from a mode of production, processing or composition corresponding to traditional practice for that product or foodstuff; or is produced from raw materials or ingredients that are those traditionally used. More information: webpages on [quality products](#) and [DOOR database](#) of protected products. (For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel: +32 229 56 185; Clémence Robin – Tel: +32 229)

Eurostat: Le taux d'épargne des ménages stable à 12,0% dans la zone euro

Au troisième trimestre 2017, le taux d'épargne des ménages a été de 12,0% dans la zone euro, stable par rapport au deuxième trimestre 2017. Le taux d'investissement des ménages a quant à lui été de 8,8% au troisième trimestre 2017 dans la zone euro, contre 8,7% au trimestre précédent. Ces informations, qui proviennent de la première diffusion de données, corrigées des variations saisonnières, sur les comptes européens trimestriels des secteurs, sont

publiées par Eurostat, l'office statistique de l'Union européenne, et la Banque centrale européenne (BCE). Un communiqué de presse est disponible [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Annika Breidthardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153; Juliana Dahl – Tel.: +32 229 59914)

Eurostat: Le taux d'investissement des entreprises en baisse à 22,4% dans la zone euro

Au troisième trimestre 2017, le taux d'investissement des entreprises s'est établi à 22,4% dans la zone euro, contre 23,1% au trimestre précédent. La part des profits des entreprises s'est quant à elle située à 41,4% au troisième trimestre 2017 dans la zone euro, contre 41,0% au deuxième trimestre 2017. Ces informations, qui proviennent de la première diffusion de données, corrigées des variations saisonnières, sur les comptes européens trimestriels des secteurs, sont publiées par Eurostat, l'office statistique de l'Union européenne, et la Banque centrale européenne (BCE). Un communiqué de presse est disponible [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Annika Breidthardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153; Juliana Dahl – Tel.: +32 229 59914)

[Calendar](#)

The Commissioners' weekly activities

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