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EU Visa Policy: Commission puts forward proposals to make it stronger, more efficient and more secure

The Commission is today proposing to reform the EU's common visa policy to adapt the rules to evolving security concerns, challenges linked to migration and new opportunities offered by technological developments. The proposed changes to the Visa Code will make it easier for legitimate travellers to obtain a visa to come to Europe, facilitating tourism, trade and business, whilst strengthening security and mitigating irregular migration risks.

Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, Dimitris **Avramopoulos** said: *"Every year, millions of travellers visit the EU and boost our travel and tourism industry. With the reforms we propose today it will become easier and faster for legitimate travellers to obtain a visa while security standards will be enhanced to better detect and stop those who are not. The new rules will also make sure our common visa policy can help improve our cooperation with non-EU countries when it comes to the return of irregular migrants."* Today's amendments to the Visa Code are the first step of the reform of the common EU visa policy – a proposal to update the Visa Information System (VIS) will follow in spring this year. A [press release](#), [Q&A](#) and a [factsheet](#) are available online. (For more information: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456; Tove Ernst – Tel.: +32 229 80423; Katarzyna Kolanko – Tel.: 32 229 63444)

European Agenda on Migration: Continuous efforts needed to sustain progress

Ahead of the March European Council, the Commission is reporting today on progress made under the European Agenda on Migration and sets out further key actions to be taken, including as set out in the Commission's roadmap from December 2017 towards a comprehensive deal on migration by June 2018. The decrease in irregular arrivals has been confirmed throughout 2017 and the first months of 2018. However, with the overall situation remaining fragile, additional efforts, notably stepped up financial resources, will be needed jointly from the Member States and the EU to ensure a continued, effective response to the migration challenge. First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans** said: *"We need to maintain this momentum and work hard to take further steps forward, including finding agreement on the reformed asylum system. Some of these actions are very urgent, such as honouring the financial contributions Member States committed to. Managing migration remains a high priority for our citizens and we will only achieve this through a truly comprehensive and collective engagement."* High Representative/Vice-President Federica **Mogherini** said: *"The strategy we have put in place to manage migration in partnership with key countries, UN organisations and the African Union is delivering. Cooperation and shared responsibilities are key to effectively address this global challenge. Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris **Avramopoulos** said: *"With arrivals down by almost 30% compared to the pre-crisis year 2014, the time is ripe to speed up and intensify our efforts across the board – not to slow down."* A [press release](#) and factsheets on the [EU-Turkey Statement](#) and the [Central Mediterranean Route](#). (For more*

information: *Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456; [Catherine Ray](#) – Tel.: +32 2 296 99 21; Tove Ernst – Tel.: +32 229 86764*)

EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey: the Commission proposes to mobilise additional funds for Syrian refugees

Following through on its commitment to support Syrian refugees in Turkey, the European Commission is today mobilising additional funding for the [Facility for Refugees](#) which has so far given 500.000 children access to education and is supporting 1.2 million refugees with monthly cash transfers. The Commission proposes to mobilise the second €3 billion tranche of the Facility, with €1 billion from the EU budget and calls on Member States to follow suit quickly so that the successful and effective work of the Facility can continue. Johannes **Hahn**, Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, said: *“Today the Commission takes the first step in the mobilisation of additional support under the Facility for Syrian Refugees in Turkey. The publication of the second annual report clearly highlights the positive results achieved so far and how vital and effective the Facility is, in supporting the most vulnerable refugees and their host communities in Turkey, thus reducing migratory pressures. I call on Member States to fulfil the commitments taken to mobilise an additional €3 billion, allowing us to continue our indispensable assistance.”* Christos **Stylianides**, Commissioner for European Humanitarian Aid & Crisis Management, said: *“From helping children attend school to giving vulnerable families access to essential services, the EU’s humanitarian aid for refugees in Turkey has delivered tangible results. 1.2 million refugees have benefitted from EU humanitarian support through our largest ever cash assistance programme. The new funding will allow us to continue working with Turkey and humanitarian organisations to assist vulnerable refugees and their host communities.”* A [press release](#) as well as a [factsheet](#) on the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey are available online. *(For more information: Maja Kocijancic – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Carlos Martin – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Alceo Smerilli – Tel.: +32 229 64887; – Daniel Puglisi – +32 229 69140)*

Reducing Risk in the Banking Union: Commission presents measures to accelerate the reduction of non-performing loans in the banking sector

The Commission is today proposing an ambitious and comprehensive package of measures to tackle non-performing loans (NPLs) in Europe, capitalising on the significant progress already made in reducing risks in the banking sector. With today’s far-reaching measures, the Commission is delivering on the Council’s Action Plan to address the high stock of NPLs and prevent their possible future accumulation. It builds on ongoing efforts by Member States, supervisors, credit institutions and the EU: this has led to stocks of NPLs declining in recent years across banks and EU countries. Valdis **Dombrovskis**, Vice-President for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, said: *“As Europe and its economy regain strength, Europe must seize the momentum and accelerate the reduction of NPLs. This is essential to further reduce risks in the European banking sector and strengthen its resilience. With fewer NPLs on their balance sheets, banks will be able to*

lend more to households and businesses. Our proposals build on the significant risk reduction already achieved in recent years, and must be an integral part of completing the Banking Union through risk reduction and risk sharing."The Commission is also presenting its second progress report on the reduction of NPLs in Europe, showing that the decline of NPL stocks is continuing. You can find the full [press release](#), [MEMO](#) and [factsheet](#) online. (For more information: Vanessa Mock – Tel.: +32 229 56194; Letizia Lupini – Tel.: +32 229 51958)

Eurostat: L'emploi en hausse de 0,3% dans la zone euro et de 0,2% dans l'UE28, respectivement +1,6% et +1,5% par rapport au quatrième trimestre 2016 (Quatrième trimestre 2017 par rapport au troisième trimestre 2017)

Le nombre de personnes ayant un emploi a augmenté de 0,3% dans la zone euro (ZE19) et de 0,2% dans l'UE28 au quatrième trimestre 2017 par rapport au trimestre précédent, selon les estimations basées sur les comptes nationaux et publiées par Eurostat, l'office statistique de l'Union européenne. Au troisième trimestre 2017, l'emploi avait progressé de 0,4% dans la zone euro et de 0,2% dans l'UE28. Ces chiffres sont corrigés des variations saisonnières. Par rapport au même trimestre de l'année précédente, l'emploi a augmenté de 1,6% dans la zone euro et de 1,5% dans l'UE28 au quatrième trimestre 2017 (après respectivement +1,7% et +1,6% au troisième trimestre 2017). Selon les estimations d'Eurostat, 236,8 millions d'hommes et de femmes avaient un emploi dans l'UE28 au quatrième trimestre 2017, dont 156,7 millions dans la zone euro. Il s'agit des plus hauts niveaux jamais enregistrés dans les deux zones. Ces chiffres sont corrigés des variations saisonnières. Sur l'ensemble de l'année 2017, l'emploi a progressé de 1,6% tant dans la zone euro que dans l'UE28, contre respectivement +1,3% et +1,2% en 2016. Ces données trimestrielles sur l'emploi fournissent une mesure du volume de la main-d'œuvre qui est cohérente avec celle de la production et des revenus dans les comptes nationaux. Un communiqué de presse Eurostat est à votre disposition [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 22962253; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: +32 229 67094)

Eurostat: La production industrielle en baisse de 1,0% dans la zone euro et en baisse de 0,7% dans l'UE28 (Janvier 2018 comparé à décembre 2017)

En janvier 2018 par rapport à décembre 2017, la production industrielle corrigée des variations saisonnières a diminué de 1,0% dans la zone euro (ZE19) et de 0,7% dans l'UE28, selon les estimations d'Eurostat, l'office statistique de l'Union européenne. En décembre 2017, la production industrielle avait progressé de 0,4% dans la zone euro et de 0,3% dans l'UE28. En janvier 2018 par rapport à janvier 2017, la production industrielle a augmenté de 2,7% dans la zone euro et de 3,0% dans l'UE28. Un communiqué de presse Eurostat est à votre disposition [en ligne](#). (For more information: Lucía Caudet – Tel.: +32 229 56182; Victoria von Hammerstein – Tel.: +32 229 55040; Maud Noyon – Tel.: +32 229 80379)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

High Representative/Vice-President Mogherini in Rome on 15 March for two ministerial-level events

High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission Federica **Mogherini** will travel to Rome on 15 March. In the morning, the High Representative/Vice-President will participate in the **Ministerial Conference on UNRWA**, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, where more than 90 countries and international organisations will be represented to discuss ways to increase financial support to UNRWA for solving the acute funding crisis the Agency is facing and to move forward the necessary reforms. The European Union is a strong supporter of the work of UNRWA, including through its predictable and reliable financing, in order to secure the continuity of the Agency's vital operations that ensure Palestine refugees in and outside of Palestine access to basic services such as education, health and jobs, pending resolution of their situation. In the afternoon, the High Representative will participate in the **Rome II Ministerial Meeting** to support the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Internal Security Forces, organised under the aegis of the International Support Group for Lebanon and hosted by the Italian Foreign Ministry. The EU is a longstanding supporter of Lebanon's security sector and has been accompanying the Lebanese authorities and other international partners' efforts to ensure the stability and security of the country for years. Federica **Mogherini** will confirm EU's continued commitment in this regard. Audio-visual coverage of the visit will be available on [EBS](#). (for more information: Maja Kocijancic – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Catherine Ray – Tel.: +32 229 69921; Lauranne Devillé – Tel.: +32 229 80833)

Vice-President Šefčovič in Bulgaria for second Energy Union Tour

Commission Vice-President for Energy Union Maroš **Šefčovič** will be in Bulgaria on 14-15 March for the second [Energy Union Tour](#). He will meet Bulgarian President Rumen Radev, Prime Minister Boyko Borissov, Minister of Energy Temenuzhka Petkova, and MPs from the Bulgarian parliament's Energy and European Affairs committees. Their discussions will focus on Bulgaria's progress towards its 2020 targets for energy efficiency, renewables and greenhouse gas emissions reduction, its energy security situation, and the development of its internal energy market. The Vice-President will also deliver a keynote speech at a conference on 'The role of non-governmental organizations for improving the energy policy and the legal basis in the field of energy – challenges in South East Europe'. Ahead of his visit, Vice-President **Šefčovič** said: *"I will encourage Bulgaria to deliver its national 2030 energy and climate plan in a comprehensive way, in a timely fashion and with involvement of civic society. The plans are not mere ink on paper but a strong signal towards investors whom we need on board for the energy transition to succeed. Our estimates show that achieving the EU's 2030 targets could lead to an increase of 1.2% in GDP of Bulgaria, more than the EU average. As Bulgaria is currently at the EU's helm, I am also looking forward to discussing the state of play of the [Clean Energy package legislative](#) proposals as well as the [Gas directive revision](#). The Bulgarian Presidency plays a vital role in getting us across the Energy Union's finish*

line". Please find more information on the [Commission's website](#). (For more information: Anca Paduraru – Tel.: +32 229 91269; Nicole Bockstaller – Tel.: +32 229 52589)

La Commissaire Gabriel à Paris pour un dialogue avec les citoyens

Demain, jeudi, 15 mars, Mariya **Gabriel**, Commissaire pour l'économie et la société numériques se rendra à Paris où elle tiendra un [dialogue avec les citoyens](#) avec M. Mounir Mahjoubi, Secrétaire d'Etat auprès du Premier ministre, chargé du Numérique dans les Halles Civiques dans le 20^{ème} arrondissement de Paris ensemble. La Halle Civique est un espace collaboratif porté par un collectif d'associations, d'entreprises, d'entrepreneurs sociaux et d'institutions, avec le soutien de la Ville de Paris. Elle y discutera avec des membres de la Halle Civique, des étudiants ainsi que des membres du réseau [OpenDemoracy](#) (Démocratique ouverte). Le dialogue avec les citoyens sera retransmis en direct via un Facebook Live Chat et peut être suivi [ici](#). Le même jour, la Commissaire tiendra un discours sur les "Opportunités numériques pour l'Europe", invitée par le réseau européen pour femmes en [European Network for Women in Leadership](#) (WIL). À l'occasion de cette visite, les membres du "European Network for Women in Leadership" lanceront la 4^{ème} édition de leur programme "Pool des compétences des femmes", qui sera parrainée par la Commissaire **Gabriel**. (Pour plus d'information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 56172; Julia-Henriette Bräuer – Tel.: +32 229 80707)

Commissioner King in Sweden to discuss cooperation on security

Commissioner for the Security Union Julian **King** will be in Sweden tomorrow where he will meet Minister for Justice, Mr Morgan Johansson and National Police Commissioner, Mr Anders Thornberg. Commissioner King will also address members of the Committee on Justice at the Swedish Parliament and deliver a speech at the Swedish Security Awards [Säkerhetsgalan 2018](#). Later in the afternoon, he will visit the National Council for Crime Prevention. (For more information: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456; Tove Ernst – Tel.: +32 229 86764; Katarzyna Kolanko – Tel.: +32 229 63444)

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