

Daily News 16 / 09 / 2019

EU invests in reliable electricity system in Czechia

The EU is investing more than €46 million from the [European Regional Development Fund](#) to modernise and extend the electricity substation of Kočín, southern Bohemia, one of the most important node in the Czech transmission system. When completed in November 2023, the project will increase the country's energy security, ensuring reliable operations even in extreme conditions. Vice-President in charge of the Energy Union Maroš Šefčovič said: *"This EU investment will boost energy security of Czechia as well as the region by reducing the risk of blackouts and by facilitating the import of clean energy from neighbouring countries. It is yet another example of the Energy Union delivering on the ground."* In addition to improving the quality, reliability and sustainability of electricity supplies to customers, this project will indeed increase the country's capacity to access renewable energy from neighbouring countries. The extension of the Kočín substation will enable the implementation of two other [Projects of Common Interest](#): the connection of a second circuit on the existing Kočín-Preštice power line and the new 120 km-long Kočín-Mírovka overhead line. These two projects will reinforce the Priority Corridor for north-south Electricity Interconnections in central-eastern and south-eastern Europe, increasing Czechia's access to renewable energy – mainly wind energy from Germany and solar power from Italy – and helping cut greenhouse gas emissions in the country. *(For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Sophie Dupin de Saint Cyr – Tel.: +32 229 56169)*

WiFi4EU: new call for municipalities to apply for free Wi-Fi network in public spaces

On 19 September at 13:00 CEST the Commission will launch a new call for applications for [WiFi4EU](#) vouchers to set up free Wi-Fi networks in public spaces, including town halls, public libraries, museums, public parks or squares. The call is open to municipalities or groups of municipalities in the EU until 20 September 2019 at 17:00 CEST. Municipalities will be able to apply for 1780 vouchers, valued €15,000 each. Commissioner for the Digital Economy and Society, Mariya Gabriel, said: *"It is with great pleasure that I can announce the opening of the call for the third round of WiFi4EU vouchers. With nearly 6000 grant agreements already signed, it is exciting to see the immediate benefits that this initiative is bringing to the lives of our citizens."* The WiFi4EU scheme is administered through a series of calls, and covers all 28 EU Member States, as well as Norway and Iceland. Once municipalities have registered on the dedicated [WiFi4EU Portal](#) they will be able to apply for a voucher with just one click. The Commission is selecting beneficiaries on a first-come, first-served basis, while ensuring geographical balance. The first two WiFi4EU calls for applications have taken place to great effect, with over 23,000 municipalities registered in the Portal and 6,200 vouchers awarded so far. The present call marks the third of four calls foreseen before the end of 2020. More information is available [online](#), in the [Questions and Answers](#) and a [factsheet](#), while a [map](#) illustrates

the number of municipalities throughout Europe who have so far benefited from the scheme. (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel. +32 229 67 083; Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58 615; Inga Höglund – Tel.: +32 229 50 698)

European Commission adopted 2019 Action Programme for the Turkish Cypriot community

The European Commission adopted today an [Annual Action Programme](#) for a total amount of €35.4 million identifying new projects to facilitate the reunification of Cyprus. The objective of the programme is to encourage the economic development of the Turkish Cypriot community with particular emphasis on the economic integration of the island, on improving contacts between the two communities and with the EU, and on preparation for the *acquis communautaire*. Vice-President Valdis **Dombrovskis**, responsible for the Euro and Social Dialogue, also in charge of Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, said: *“Our aid programme remains as relevant as ever. This new set of projects seeks to improve infrastructure, support economic development, foster reconciliation, and bring Turkish Cypriots closer to the EU. I am confident it will contribute to the settlement effort which is the ultimate goal of our assistance.”* Assistance to the Turkish Cypriot community is provided through the EU’s Aid Programme and is managed by the Commission’s [Structural Reform Support Service](#). The full press release is available [online](#). (For more information: Annika Breidthardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153; Annikky Lamp – Tel.: +32 229 56151)

More than 14,500 workers supported by the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund in past two years

The European Commission has published today a [report on the activities and results of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund \(EGF\) in the years 2017 and 2018](#). The publication confirms the relevance of the fund over the reporting period: The European Parliament and the Council adopted 15 decisions to mobilise the EGF funding for a total amount of €45.5 million to support more than 14,500 beneficiaries. Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne **Thyssen** said: *“Over the years, the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund has really demonstrated European solidarity, helping thousands of redundant workers to re- and upskill. For the time after 2020, the Fund will be revised so that it can intervene more effectively to support workers who have lost their jobs.”* Particularly concerned was the machinery/equipment sector, followed by retail trade and air transport. As regards the 23 EGF cases adopted between 2014 and 2016, the results showed that 60% of the workers who participated in the measures had found new jobs by the end of the implementation period. This is an increase by 13 pp compared to the previous reporting periods. The EGF was set up in 2007 to support workers who lose their jobs as a result of globalisation and changing trade patterns or a financial and economic crisis. It is an expression of European solidarity towards workers by helping them adapt their skills and finding new jobs. Since its launch, the EGF has received 161 applications. Some €635 million have been requested to offer help to more than 151,000 workers and 4,429 young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs). Most recently, the Commission adopted a [proposal to specify that redundancies due to a no-deal Brexit are covered in the scope of the](#)

[EGF](#). For the next long-term budget 2021-2027, the [Commission proposed a number of revisions to the Fund](#), including an increased budget and lower eligibility threshold, so that it can intervene even more effectively to support workers who lost their jobs. (For more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: + 32 229 67094)

La Commission lance la semaine européenne de la mobilité 2019 et promeut les engagements de l'UE en matière de sécurité routière avec les villes européennes

C'est aujourd'hui que débute la 18e édition de la semaine européenne de la mobilité, la [EuropeanMobilityWeek](#), la campagne phare de la Commission européenne en faveur d'un transport urbain propre et durable. Du 16 au 22 septembre, près de 3 000 villes et villages de 54 pays se sont inscrits pour s'inscrire au programme WalkWithUs. L'événement de lancement à Bruxelles comprend une table ronde sur la sécurité routière, co-organisée par la Commission européenne et l'Alliance mondiale des ONG pour la sécurité routière. L'UE et les villes européennes vont « remettre » aux ONG leurs engagements en matière de sécurité routière en vue de [la conférence ministérielle mondiale sur la sécurité routière de Stockholm en février 2020](#), notamment sur l'objectif de l'UE consistant à réduire de moitié le nombre de morts et de blessés graves sur les routes européennes entre 2020 et 2030. La commissaire chargée des transports, Violeta **Bulc**, a déclaré: « Cette année, nous souhaitons rappeler aux citoyens européens que la marche et le cyclisme sont des activités agréables, revitalisantes et totalement gratuites. Cela permet aussi souvent de relier facilement son travail ou la gare et l'UE a déployé de nombreux efforts pour en faire des activités sûres. Je suis très heureuse que nous ayons pu associer cette fantastique campagne à la conférence de Stockholm sur la sécurité routière, qui constituera une étape cruciale dans notre combat pour des routes plus sûres dans le monde entier. Nous devons, dans l'UE, montrer la voie. J'espère que nous pourrons nous mettre d'accord sur des objectifs ambitieux aux niveaux mondial et régional et assurer un suivi au moyen d'un suivi détaillé. » La commissaire **Bulc** a également lancé le "Prix de la sécurité routière urbaine" pour les villes, qui sera remis au printemps prochain. Vous trouverez [ici](#) plus d'informations sur la table ronde sur la sécurité routière. (Pour plus d'informations: Enrico Brivio – Tél .: +32 229 56172, Stephan Meder – Tél.: +32 229 139 17)

State aid: Commission approves Belgian scheme to support electro-intensive users

The European Commission has approved under EU State aid rules a Belgian aid scheme supporting electro-intensive companies in Flanders (Belgium). Under the scheme, electro-intensive users will benefit from a reduction in their contribution to a regional Energy Fund to support renewable energy and cogeneration. The contribution is capped at a certain percentage of the beneficiaries' gross value added (GVA). The main aim of the measure is to avoid that electro-intensive companies, which bear significant costs for supporting the production of renewable energy and cogeneration, are put at a competitive disadvantage. The Commission assessed the measure under EU State aid rules, in particular under the [Guidelines on State aid for environmental protection and energy 2014-2020](#). It found that the measure supports the

production of electricity from renewable energy sources and high-efficiency cogeneration, in line with EU environmental objectives, without unduly distorting competition. On this basis, the Commission concluded that the Belgian scheme is 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.52367. (For more information: Lucía Caudet – Tel. +32 229 56182; Giulia Astuti – Tel.: +32 229 55344)

State aid: Commission opens in-depth investigations into individual “excess profit” tax rulings granted by Belgium to 39 multinational companies

The European Commission has opened separate in-depth investigations to assess whether “excess profit” tax rulings granted by Belgium to 39 multinational companies gave those companies an unfair advantage over their competitors, in breach of EU State aid rules. Today’s opening decisions follow the General Court’s February 2019 annulment of the Commission’s [January 2016](#) decision concluding that the same tax rulings formed part of a Belgian aid scheme that was illegal under EU State aid rules. The Court did not take a position on whether or not the “excess profit” tax exemptions gave rise to illegal State aid but found that the Commission had failed to establish the existence of a scheme. This means that, according to the General Court, the compatibility of the tax rulings with EU State aid rules needs to be assessed individually, which is why the Commission has now opened separate in-depth investigations into the individual tax rulings. At the same time, the Commission has appealed the judgment of the General Court to the European Court of Justice to seek further clarity on the existence of an aid scheme. These proceedings are ongoing. The in-depth investigations concern individual “excess profit” tax rulings issued by Belgium between 2005 and 2014 in favour of 39 Belgian companies belonging to multinational groups. The Commission has concerns that the tax rulings may have given a selective advantage to the 39 multinational companies, allowing them to pay substantially less tax. The opening of the in-depth investigations gives Belgium and interested third parties an opportunity to submit comments. It does not prejudge the outcome of the investigation. Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager** in charge of competition policy said: *“All companies must pay their fair share of tax. We are concerned that the Belgian “excess profit” tax system granted substantial tax reductions only to certain multinational companies that would not be available to companies in a comparable situation. Following the General Court’s guidance, we have decided to open separate State aid investigations to assess the tax rulings. We also await further clarity from the European Court of Justice on the existence of an aid scheme.”* A full press release is available in [EN](#), [DE](#), [FR](#), and [NL](#). (For more information: Lucía Caudet – Tel. +32 229 56182; Giulia Astuti – Tel.: +32 229 55344)

EU tax transparency tools prove effective in the fight against tax evasion and tax avoidance

EU tax transparency rules on the automatic exchange of information between

Member States are delivering added value when it comes to countries' ability to crack down on tax avoidance, according to an evaluation published today by the Commission. The report provides a first snapshot of the commonly agreed legislation underpinning the obligatory automatic exchange of tax information on non-financial income and assets of some 16 million taxpayers within Europe, of information exchanges on financial accounts, as well as on the tax rulings that Member States provide multinational companies. For example, in 2017 Member States exchanged information on almost 18,000 tax rulings given to multinationals. The evaluation shows that Member States now receive considerably more information that can help fight tax fraud, evasion and avoidance and are still in the process of finding the most efficient ways to use the data, to evaluate the added value and deterrent effects. The Commission continues to encourage all EU countries to make full use of their access to the wealth of useful tax information being made available through these new channels. While too recent to examine in this study, even more tax data has now started to be exchanged between Member States, such as on the corporate tax revenues paid by big companies in each country, since new rules entered into application on 1 January 2013. From next year, Member States will also start sharing intelligence on the tax planning advice being provided by intermediaries in each country. The report itself and more information on the current rules (Council Directive on Administrative Cooperation, 2011/16/EU) are available [here](#). (For more information: Vanessa Mock – Tel.: [+32 229 56194](tel:+3222956194); Patrick McCullough – Tel.: [+32 229 87183](tel:+3222987183))

Eurostat: Le taux d'emplois vacants à 2,3% dans la zone euro, à 2,3% dans l'UE28 (deuxième trimestre 2019)

Le taux d'emplois vacants s'est établi à 2,3% dans la zone euro (ZE19) au deuxième trimestre 2019, restant stable par rapport au taux du trimestre précédent et plus élevé par rapport au taux de 2,1% relevé au deuxième trimestre 2018, selon les chiffres publiés par Eurostat, l'office statistique de l'Union Européenne. Le taux d'emplois vacants dans l'UE28 s'est quant à lui établi à 2,3% au deuxième trimestre 2019, stable par rapport au taux de 2,3% du trimestre précédent et en hausse par rapport au taux de 2,2% enregistré au deuxième trimestre 2018. Dans la zone euro, le taux d'emplois vacants au deuxième trimestre 2019 s'est établi à 2,0% dans le secteur de l'industrie et de la construction et à 2,6% dans celui des services. Dans l'UE28, le taux était de 2,1% dans le secteur de l'industrie et de la construction et de 2,6% dans celui des services. Un communiqué de presse est à votre disposition [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Annika Breidhardt – Tél.: [+32 229 56153](tel:+3222956153); Annikky Lamp – Tél.: [+32 229 56151](tel:+3222956151))

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Commissioner Hahn in Georgia to launch the first European School outside EU borders

Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes **Hahn** is today in Tbilisi, to launch together with Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia, the European School in [Georgia](#), the first European School

outside EU borders. The joint initiative will lead to the establishment of a school for Georgian students, as well as students from across the region, to follow an education model based on European and international values of multiculturalism, peace and tolerance. Commissioner Johannes **Hahn** said: “As *European Commissioner, my priority has been to help young people in the countries neighbouring the European Union by providing them with more opportunities, developing their skills and fostering their employability. In this context, we have doubled our funding in the [Eastern Partnership](#) for youth and education and achieved significant results. The launch of the European School in Georgia is an excellent example of our commitment to bring tangible benefits to the lives of citizens.*” The School will be built next to Tbilisi’s Lisi Lake, and is expected to open its doors to the first cohort of students in 2023. Students from Georgia, as well as from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine, will be able to follow a unique curriculum that meets the high demands of the Georgian, European and international education systems. More information is available [here](#). Commissioner **Hahn** delivered a [speech](#) earlier this morning. Photos and videos of the visit will be available on [EbS](#). The EU – Georgia Relations [factsheet](#) is also available online. (*For more information: Maja Kocijancic – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Alceo Smerilli – Tel.: +32 229 64887*)

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