

Whistleblower protection: Commission sets new, EU-wide rules

The European Commission is proposing a new law to strengthen whistleblower protection across the EU. Recent scandals such as Dieselgate, Luxleaks, the Panama Papers or the ongoing Cambridge Analytica revelations show that whistleblowers can play an important role in uncovering unlawful activities that damage the public interest and the welfare of our citizens and society. First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans** said: *“Many recent scandals may never have come to light if insiders hadn’t had the courage to speak out. But those who did took enormous risks. So if we better protect whistleblowers, we can better detect and prevent harm to the public interest such as fraud, corruption, corporate tax avoidance or damage to people’s health and the environment. There should be no punishment for doing the right thing. In addition, today’s proposals also protect those who act as sources for investigative journalists, helping to ensure that freedom of expression and freedom of the media are defended in Europe.”* Today’s proposal will guarantee a high level of protection for whistleblowers who report breaches of EU law by setting new, EU-wide standards. The new law will establish safe channels for reporting both within an organisation and to public authorities. It will also protect whistleblowers against dismissal, demotion and other forms of retaliation and require national authorities to inform citizens and provide training for public authorities on how to deal with whistleblowers. Věra **Jourová**, Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality added: *“The new whistleblowers’ protection rules will be a game changer. In the globalised world where the temptation to maximise profit sometimes at the expense of the law is real we need to support people who are ready to take the risk to uncover serious violations of EU law. We owe it to the honest people of Europe. A [Press Release](#), [Memo](#) and [Factsheet](#) are all available online. (For more information: Christian Wigand– Tel.: +32 229 62253; Mélanie Voin – Tel.: +32 229 58659; Tim McPhie: +32 229-58602)*

EU and Mexico reach new agreement on trade

The European Union and Mexico reached last Saturday, 21 April, a new agreement on trade, part of a broader, modernised EU-Mexico Global Agreement. The agreement in principle brings the EU’s trade relationship with Mexico into the modern era, tearing down most of the remaining barriers to trade. European Commission President Jean-Claude **Juncker** said: *“Trade can and should be a win-win process and today’s agreement shows just that. With this agreement, Mexico joins Canada, Japan and Singapore in the growing list of partners willing to work with the EU in defending open, fair and rules-based trade.”* Commissioner for Trade Cecilia **Malmström** added: *“In less than two years the EU and Mexico have delivered a deal fit for the economic and political challenges of the 21st century. We now open a new chapter in our long and fruitful relationship, boosting trade and creating jobs.”* Commissioner for Agriculture, Phil **Hogan**, said: *“This deal is very positive for our agri-food sector, creating new export opportunities for our high-quality food and drink products, which in turn will create support more jobs*

and growth, particularly in rural areas.” The agreement – once finalised and approved – will benefit both companies and consumers across Europe and advance the EU’s values-based trade policy agenda. For more information see the [press release](#), [MEMO](#) and a [joint statement](#) from Saturday, as well as the [dedicated webpage](#) with [factsheets](#), [exporters’ stories](#) and the text of the [agreement in principle](#) (to be published soon). A [press conference](#) by Commissioner **Malmström** and Commissioner **Hogan** can be watched online. (*For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel.: +32 229 56185; Kinga Malinowska – Tel.: +32 229 51383*)

Façonner la mondialisation: La Commission mobilise 9,8 millions d’euros pour aider d’anciens travailleurs d’Air France à trouver un nouvel emploi

Répondant à une demande de la France, la Commission européenne a proposé aujourd’hui de mobiliser 9,8 millions d’euros provenant du [Fonds européen d’ajustement à la mondialisation \(FEM\)](#), pour aider près de 1 900 travailleurs licenciés par Air France, la compagnie aérienne française, à trouver un nouvel emploi. Marianne **Thyssen**, commissaire européenne chargée de l’emploi, des affaires sociales, des compétences et de la mobilité des travailleurs, a déclaré à ce propos: *«Les transports aériens, comme d’autres secteurs et industries en Europe, traversent actuellement une période de modifications structurelles majeures en raison de changements dans la structure du commerce mondial. Notre Fonds européen d’ajustement à la mondialisation soutient des travailleurs dont la situation est difficile dans cette transition difficile, en les aidant à adapter leurs compétences et à trouver un nouvel emploi. Il s’agit d’une expression concrète de la solidarité européenne.»* La France a sollicité le soutien du FEM à la suite du licenciement de 1 858 travailleurs chez Air France. Les mesures cofinancées par le FEM aideront les travailleurs licenciés à retrouver un emploi en mettant à leur disposition des services actifs d’orientation professionnelle, des formations professionnelles et en contribuant aux allocations de recherche d’emploi et aux allocations de mobilité. La proposition va maintenant être soumise à l’approbation du Parlement européen et du Conseil de l’Union européenne. Plus d’informations sont disponibles dans ce [communiqué de presse](#). (*Pour plus d’informations: Christian Wigand– Tel.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: + 32 229 67094*)

Special Eurobarometer: How fair do Europeans think life in the EU is?

A new poll, published today, shows that most Europeans think life is generally fair, but have concerns over justice, political decisions and income inequality. Tibor **Navracsics**, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, responsible for the Joint Research Centre, which conducted the Eurobarometer, said: *“Fairness is a crucial part of building a more resilient, cohesive Europe. Our initiatives in this area need to be based on sound evidence, but at the same time take Europeans’ values and perceptions into account. I am proud that the JRC’s work is helping us increase our knowledge on both counts, making a vital contribution to our efforts to build*

a better Europe for the future.” European Commission President Jean-Claude **Juncker** made fairness in the EU the cornerstone of his political priorities. To support this effort with scientific evidence, the Commission’s science and knowledge service, the [Joint Research Centre](#), produced its first [Fairness Report](#) last year. The results of the Special Eurobarometer survey published today will help shed light on the wider questions of perceived unfairness in employment, education, health and society at large. The Eurobarometer, a report and accompanying country fiches for all EU Member States are published [here](#). A full press release is available [online](#). (For more information: *Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Joseph Waldstein – Tel.: +32 229 56184*)

New recommendation to support cross-border market access for defence and security SMEs

Today the Commission issued a [recommendation](#) on cross-border market access for sub-suppliers and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the defence sector. It outlines actions national authorities can take to support SMEs and make it easier for them to take part in defence procurement contracts. Commissioner Elżbieta **Bieńkowska**, responsible for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, said: *“Innovative SMEs are a vital part of the EU defence industry. But they face too many barriers to participating in defence procurement, particularly across borders. Today’s recommendation should foster a more dynamic defence market, creating opportunities for SMEs and providing better value for public money.”* This recommendation also includes actions to be taken on the EU and national level, such as using national and European funding for defence-oriented SMEs and intermediate companies and addressing skills needs in the defence sector. The recommendation was announced in the 2016 [European Defence Action Plan](#) (EDAP), where the Commission envisaged work to strengthen an open and competitive defence market in Europe in order to help companies operate across borders and encourage Member States to get the best value for money when procuring in the defence area. As part of the Action Plan, the Commission has already launched last year the [European Defence Fund](#). (For more information: *Lucía Caudet – Tel.: +32 229 56182; Maud Noyon – Tel. +32 229-80379; Victoria von Hammerstein – Tel.: +32 229 55040*)

State aid: Commission opens in-depth investigation into Italian State loan to Alitalia

The European Commission has opened an in-depth investigation to assess whether Italy’s bridge loan to Alitalia totalling €900 million constitutes State aid and whether it complies with EU rules for aid to companies in difficulty. Italy notified the State loan granted to Alitalia in January 2018 as rescue aid within the meaning of EU State aid rules, namely the Commission’s [Rescue and Restructuring Aid Guidelines](#). This followed a number of complaints received by the Commission in 2017, alleging that the loan constitutes State aid that it is not compatible with the applicable EU rules.

The Commission's current view is that the State loan may constitute State aid. It will now investigate further whether the loan satisfies the conditions under the Guidelines. The opening of an in-depth investigation provides all interested parties with an opportunity to comment on the measure. It does not prejudice in any way the outcome of the investigation. Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said: *"The Commission has a duty to make sure that loans given to companies by Member States are in line with the EU rules on State aid. We will investigate whether this is the case for Alitalia."* A full press release is available online in [EN](#), [IT](#), [FR](#) and [DE](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Yizhou Ren – Tel.: +32 229 94889)

Eurostat: Transmission des données du déficit et de la dette pour 2017 – 1ère notification – Déficit public de la zone euro et de l'UE28 respectivement de 0,9% et 1,0 % du PIB – Dette publique à 86,7% et 81,6%

Le déficit ainsi que la dette publique se sont réduits en termes relatifs en 2017 par rapport à 2016, tant dans la zone euro (ZE19) que dans l'UE28. Le ratio du déficit public par rapport au PIB a baissé dans la zone euro, passant de 1,5% en 2016 à 0,9% en 2017, ainsi que dans l'UE28, de 1,6% à 1,0%. Le ratio de la dette publique par rapport au PIB a reculé dans la zone euro, passant de 89,0% à la fin de l'année 2016 à 86,7% à la fin de l'année 2017, ainsi que dans l'UE28, de 83,3% à 81,6%. Un communiqué de presse est disponible [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Christian Spahr – Tel.: + 32 229 50055; Enda McNamara – Tel.: +32 229 64976)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Conference on Supporting the future of Syria and the region: Commissioner Hahn meets young people from the region and Commissioner Stylianides inaugurates a photo exhibition on the EU response to the Syrian crisis

Today Commissioner **Hahn** is hosting an event organised by the [EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis](#). Young people, students and young entrepreneurs from Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, who have all benefitted from EU Trust Fund projects will raise their voice, share their aspirations and visions for their countries, and their messages for the [Brussels II conference](#) with Commissioner **Hahn**. The event will also feature the pianist Aeham Ahmad, who in 2013 risked his life to play the piano in the besieged city of Yarmouk aiming at transmitting a message of hope and joy to his fellow citizens facing the siege. Thanks to his music, Aeham has now become an advocate for the cause of refugees all over Europe. An exhibition featuring EU Trust Fund projects will follow Ahmad's performance. On the same day at 14h at the Justus Lipsius building of the European Council, Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos **Stylianides** will inaugurate a [photo exhibition](#) dedicated to the concrete results of EU Humanitarian Aid Operations in both Syria and neighbouring countries such as Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. It tells the personal stories of Syrians that received this aid, showing individual stories of survival, resilience and human determination to rebuild life as normal as possible. WFP, UNICEF, UNHCR, ICRC and Gruppo di Volontariato Civile (GVC) have contributed with

pictures. These two events will conclude the run-up to the [Brussels II Conference on Supporting the future of Syria and the region #SyriaConf2018](#), due to kick off tomorrow. Both events will be broadcast live on [EbS](#). (For more information: Maja Kocijancic – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Carlos Martin Ruiz De Gorcejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Alceo Smerilli – Tel.: +32 229 64887; Daniel Puglisi – Tel.: +32 229 69140)

Conférence: Comment investir avec une empreinte environnementale réduite?

Les 23 et 25 avril, le Commissaire **Vella** présentera à une conférence organisée à Bruxelles les résultats d'une série de projets pilotes examinant la meilleure façon de calculer l'empreinte environnementale des entreprises. La Commission a travaillé avec plus de 260 entreprises et autres organisations s'étant portées volontaires pour développer une méthode harmonisée, fiable et comparable de calcul de l'empreinte environnementale. Les résultats concerneront les secteurs de l'agriculture (alimentation animale), de l'alimentation et des boissons (produits laitiers, pâtes alimentaires), des matières premières (production de cuivre) et des produits de consommation high-tech (panneaux solaires, batteries pour smartphones et voitures électriques). Les consommateurs, les entreprises et les investisseurs sont devenus plus conscients des impacts environnementaux des produits. Le soutien financier, la production et la décision d'acheter un produit sont tous influencés par des considérations durables. Réduire l'empreinte environnementale aide aussi à améliorer les stratégies de gestion des risques et à développer des chaînes d'approvisionnement plus solides. La conférence fait partie de la stratégie de la Commission pour amener le système financier à soutenir les actions de l'UE en matière de climat et de développement durable, comme annoncé dans le [Plan d'action sur la finance durable](#). Plus d'informations sont disponibles [ici](#). (For more information: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: + 32 229 56172; Iris Petsa – Tel.: +32 229 93321)

High Representative/Vice-President Mogherini and Commissioners Avramopoulos and King attend G7 meeting in Toronto

Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship **Dimitris Avramopoulos** and Commissioner for the Security Union **Julian King** will participate today and tomorrow in the [G7 meeting of Foreign and Security Ministers](#) in Toronto, Canada, joining the EU High Representative/Vice-President **Federica Mogherini** who has been participating in the [meeting of G7 Foreign Ministers](#) since Sunday. High Representative/Vice-President Mogherini and the Foreign Minister of Canada, **Chrystia Freeland** yesterday announced that they will co-host a [meeting of all women foreign ministers](#) in Canada this September. Building on the outcome of the [G7 Interior Ministers](#) meeting in Ischia, Italy last October, Commissioners Avramopoulos and King will join Ministers from Canada, Germany, France, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States of America to discuss steps towards building a more secure world. The discussions will focus in particular on the fight against terrorism, the prevention of violent extremism online and offline, trafficking in human beings, and building resilience against the cyber threat and new forms of hybrid warfare. There will also be a joint discussion with

Ministers of Foreign Affairs on Russia, disinformation, foreign terrorist fighters and reinforcing democracy. (For more information: *Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456; Maja Kocijancic – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Tove Ernst – Tel.: +32 229 86764*)

Citizens' Dialogue: Commissioner Andriukaitis in Austria

On Tuesday, Commissioner **Andriukaitis** will be in Vienna to meet with Ms Beate Hartinger-Klein, the Minister of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection of Austria and to attend the 1st International Animal Welfare Summit 2018. The Commissioner will also hold a **Citizens' Dialogue** that will be webstreamed [here](#). *"I am looking forward to engaging in dialogue with the people of Austria on important topics such as food safety, food waste, sustainable food production in Europe and the role that consumers play in these areas of discussion",* said Commissioner **Andriukaitis** ahead of the visit. (For more information: *Anca Paduraru – Tel.: +32 229 91269; Aikaterini Apostola – Tel.: +32 229 87624*)

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