

# Daily News 27 / 02 / 2019

## **COLLEGE MEETING: European Semester Winter Package: assessing Member States' progress on economic and social priorities**

In its annual assessment of the economic and social situation in the Member States, the European Commission today stresses the need to promote investment, pursue responsible fiscal policies and implement well-designed reforms. The 28 [Country Reports](#) published today zoom in on the national dimension of the European Semester. The reports provide a detailed analysis of country-specific economic and social challenges. They will serve as the basis for discussions with Member States of their national policy choices ahead of their national programmes in April, and will lead to the formulation in late spring of annual Country-Specific Recommendations. The documents are part of a broader package, which the Commission publishes today. It includes a [Chapeau Communication](#) summarising the findings of the Country Reports and updating the categorisation of countries under the Macroeconomic Imbalances Procedure as well as its [Opinion on the updated Draft Budgetary Plan \(DBP\) for Slovenia](#). A link to all documents can be found in the press release available in all languages [here](#). A memo is available [here](#). (For more information: Annika Breidhardt – Tel.: +32 229 50055; Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Annikky Lamp – Tel.: +32 229 56151; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: +32 229 67094)

## **RÉUNION DU COLLÈGE: Initiative citoyenne européenne: la Commission enregistre l'initiative « Europe CARES – Une éducation inclusive de qualité pour les enfants handicapés »**

La Commission européenne a décidé aujourd'hui d'enregistrer une initiative citoyenne européenne intitulée « Europe CARES – Une éducation inclusive de qualité pour les enfants handicapés ». L'objectif de l'initiative est de garantir: « *Le droit des enfants et des adultes handicapés à une éducation inclusive au sein de l'Union européenne* ». Aux termes de l'initiative, tandis que « *plus de 70 millions de citoyens de l'UE sont porteurs de handicap et [que] 15 millions d'enfants ont des besoins éducatifs spéciaux* », un grand nombre d'entre eux « *se heurtent à des obstacles excessifs dans [l'exercice de] leur droit à une éducation inclusive de qualité* ». Les organisateurs demandent dès lors à la Commission d'« *élaborer un projet de loi sur un cadre commun de l'UE en matière d'éducation inclusive, propre à garantir qu'aucun enfant ne sera laissé pour compte, pour ce qui est des services d'intervention précoce, de l'éducation et de la transition vers le marché du travail* ». En vertu des traités, l'UE peut adopter des actes juridiques visant à combattre la discrimination fondée sur le handicap, de même qu'elle peut appuyer l'action des États membres en ce qui concerne les systèmes éducatifs et la formation professionnelle. La Commission a dès lors considéré l'initiative comme recevable sur le plan juridique et décidé de l'enregistrer. À ce stade du processus, la Commission n'en analyse pas le fond. L'enregistrement de cette initiative aura lieu le 4 mars 2019 et

marquera le début d'un processus de douze mois au cours duquel les signatures de soutien seront collectées par ses organisateurs. Si, en l'espace d'un an, l'initiative recueille un million de déclarations de soutien, provenant d'au moins sept États membres différents, la Commission procédera à son analyse et disposera d'un délai de trois mois pour réagir. Le communiqué de presse complet est [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: *Natasha Bertaud – Tél.: +32 229 67456; Kasia Kolanko – Tél.: +32 229 63444*)

### **COLLEGE MEETING: European Commission publishes practical arrangements for staff participating in European elections**

The European Commission has adopted today a Decision providing practical guidance for staff of the European Commission with regard to their participation in the European elections campaign in 2019. The guidelines are based on the already existing principles spelled out in the Staff Regulations – the rules under which the Commission manages its human resources, agreed by the European Parliament and the Member States in the Council. Today's rules also complement the practical arrangements for Commissioners participating in the European elections in May, that the Commission issued [earlier this month](#). According to today's Decision and in line with the already existing rules, Commission staff is allowed to participate in the election campaign provided that three general conditions are respected. Firstly, staff members must make a clear, public distinction between their private capacity as campaigners and their official capacity as staff members. Secondly, they must not use Commission resources for the purpose of the campaign. Finally yet importantly, staff must take particular care to comply with confidentiality rules, and abstain from any action or public expression of opinion that might reflect adversely on their position. More specifically, staff members who have been selected and standing as candidates shall inform the Commission which will have to decide on the necessary adaptations to working arrangements – using annual leave, part-time or leave on personal grounds as necessary – as any involvement in the political campaign should happen outside working hours. In particular, candidates will, as a general rule, be required to apply for leave on personal grounds for a period of one month before the polling day. Staff members not standing for election must pursue their political activities in a strictly private capacity, and carry them out outside working hours, at weekends or during annual leave. At the same time, Commission staff working on initiatives to encourage participation in European elections in general can do so without taking a special leave. This is because those activities are not considered to be linked to any political party, candidate or organisation. The full guidance are available online [here](#). (For more information: *Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 229-91382; Andreana Stankova – Tel.: +32 229 57857*)

**COLLEGE MEETING: Commission continues to strengthen the presence of women among its management by appointing a new senior manager to its statistical department**

The European Commission has today decided to appoint Ms Sophie Limpach to the position of Director for “Business and trade statistics” in its Directorate-General for statistics, DG Eurostat, also known as the European Union’s statistical office. Ms Limpach, a Belgian national, joined the European Commission from the private sector in 2001. She spent her career in the European Commission working for Eurostat in a variety of posts, dealing with different topics from budget and human resource management to managing teams, producing short-term business, tourism and industrial statistics. She first became a Head of Unit in 2011. Ms Limpach is currently leading the unit in charge of International trade in goods statistics in DG Eurostat. Since June 2018, she has been acting Director for “Business and trade statistics”. With today’s appointment, the European Commission remains well on track to achieve the target of at least 40% women on middle and senior management positions by November 2019. Women currently represent 39.6% of all managers in the Commission. *(For more information: Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 229-91382; Andreana Stankova – Tel.: +32 229 57857)*

### **EU budget for 2021-2027: Significant progress on the new Space Programme, but not there yet**

The European Parliament, the Council and the Commission yesterday evening made significant progress in negotiations on the EU Space Programme, which will help maintain and further enhance the EU’s leadership in space. The Commission however expressed strong reservations on a number of important institutional issues. The Commission proposed the new EU Space Programme [in June 2018](#) as part of the [EU-long-term budget](#) for the years 2021-2027. The new Space Programme will bring all existing and new space activities under the umbrella of a single programme. In addition to maintaining existing infrastructure and services, the new programme will foster a strong and innovative space industry, in particular small and medium-sized enterprises, start-ups and pioneering businesses. It will encourage scientific and technical progress and support EU action in areas such as high performance computing, climate change or security. The programme will preserve the EU’s autonomous, reliable and cost-effective access to space. To achieve all these objectives, the Commission has proposed a unified and simplified system of governance. Efficient decision-making is vital so that all EU space activities are rolled out on time and on budget. The Commission will continue to be responsible for managing the overall programme. The intergovernmental European Space Agency (ESA), given its unmatched expertise, will remain a major partner in the technical and operational implementation of the EU space programme. The European Global Navigation Satellite Systems Agency, to be renamed the ‘EU Agency for the Space Programme’, will increasingly support the exploitation and market uptake of EU space activities and play an increased role in ensuring the security of all the components of the programme. The Commission holds the view that the final agreement must be prudent in the amount of core tasks to be delegated by the Commission and that subdelegation is not permitted under EU law. The Commission also stresses that the final agreement should recall the need to preserve the EU’s interests by ensuring that third countries do not participate in decision-making on the EU Space Programme. *(For more information: Lucía Caudet – Tel.: +32 229-56182; Mirna Talko – Tel.: +32 229 87278)*

## **Brexit Preparedness: Commission welcomes political agreement on basic road transport for freight and passengers**

Yesterday, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU reached a provisional political agreement on the European Commission's [proposal for a Brexit contingency measure in road transport](#). This measure is part of the [no-deal Contingency Action Plan](#), which aims at limiting the most significant damage caused by a possible "no-deal" scenario. Commissioner for Transport Violeta Bulc welcomed the agreement: *"I hope that this measure will never be needed, however it is our duty to prepare for a "no-deal" scenario. This Regulation will avoid the most serious disruptions for citizens and businesses by allowing basic road transport connectivity for a limited time between the EU and the United Kingdom. It provides legal certainty for operators and passengers."* The Regulation will allow United Kingdom operators to carry goods and passengers between the EU and the United Kingdom, provided the United Kingdom grants EU operators equivalent rights, it continues to comply with relevant social and technical rules of the EU and fair competition between EU and United Kingdom operators is ensured. The Regulation will also allow United Kingdom hauliers to carry out limited operations within the territory of the EU, decreasing over time. The Regulation will cease to apply at the end of 2019. Following this provisional agreement, this contingency measure will have to be formally approved by the European Parliament and the Council, before it can enter into force. (For more information: Daniel Rosario +32 229 56185; Stephan Meder – Tel.: +32 229 13917)

## **Free and fair elections: second meeting of the European elections network**

The European elections cooperation network meets today for the second time to further discuss how to best protect elections from current threats. This meeting will focus on the monitoring and enforcement of electoral campaign rules, in particular on data protection and on the transparency of online electoral campaigns and their funding. Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, Věra Jourová said: *"We have learnt the lessons from the last months and years- our elections are the target of cyberattacks, misuse of data, disinformation and meddling from foreign actors. The priority for EU governments should be now to set up proper structures to deal with the risks and take measures to protect the electoral and make sure citizens are well informed."* The meeting will focus on the following issues, among others: 1/ discuss the results of the mapping on electoral campaign and spending rules; 2/ engage with Europol on the monitoring and cooperation between authorities in the electoral context; 3/ monitoring and enforcing electoral campaign, disinformation and hate speech related rules; 4/ look into national approaches ensuring transparency of social media providers. The election network was one of the concrete actions from the [free and fair European elections](#) package proposed by President Juncker in his 2018 State of the Union address. Other measures and recommendations of this package were endorsed by the Council in its [conclusions](#) of 19 February. The Member States

will also prepare for the practical test on cyber preparedness ahead of the upcoming European elections, where they will discuss simulated incident scenarios. The network brings together Member State representatives, Commission and the European External Action Service experts. All information on the European elections network and the agenda of this meeting is available [here](#). (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Mélanie Voin – Tel.: +32 229 58659)

### **Capital Markets Union: Commission welcomes agreement on EU rules on covered bonds**

The Commission welcomes the political agreement reached by the European Parliament and Member States on new rules to promote the EU covered bonds market. An important element of the [Capital Markets Union](#), the new rules will provide a source of long-term financing for banks in support to the real economy. The agreed rules aim to foster the development of covered bonds – financial instruments issued by banks to fund the economy – across the EU, particularly in those Member States where such markets have not yet developed. They will create a harmonised EU framework without disrupting already established and well-functioning national markets. Commission Vice-President Valdis **Dombrovskis**, responsible for the Euro and Social Dialogue, also in charge of Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, said: *“This agreement is an important step towards the development of the Capital Markets Union. The CMU aims to mobilise and channel capital to all EU businesses that need resources to expand and thrive. We want to make it easier and cheaper for banks to finance companies and households. By agreeing on the proposal today, the European Union is delivering on its commitment to put in place the building blocks of the CMU”*. Vice-President Jyrki **Katainen**, responsible for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness, said: *“The agreement is part of the Capital Markets Union, our strategy to strengthen capital markets and encourage investment and lending in the EU. The new rules will boost the EU-wide development of covered bonds and its use as a stable and cost-effective source of funding for European banks. This widening of the sources of financing and investment for banks should lead to overall savings in borrowing costs for businesses and retail customers”*. A full press release is available [here](#). (For more information: Annika Breidthardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153; Letizia Lupini – Tel.: +32 229 51958)

### **Capital Markets Union: Agreement simplifies rules for investment firms to support open and vibrant capital markets**

The Commission welcomes the political agreement reached by the European Parliament and Member States on more proportionate and effective prudential rules for investment firms (IFR). This will help to improve investment flows across the EU and delivering better protection for investors. A key element of the EU’s [Capital Markets Union](#), the revised legislation will ensure more proportionate rules and better supervision for all investment firms on capital, liquidity and other risk management requirements. It should also

ensure a level-playing field between large and systemic financial institutions: investment firms which carry out bank-like activities and pose similar risks as banks will be subject to the same rules and supervision as banks. On the other hand, simpler and less risky firms will benefit from a fully revised rulebook more tailored to their business models. As part of the new framework, equivalence rules for the provision of investment services by third country firms will also be strengthened and clarified. Commission Vice-President Valdis **Dombrovskis**, responsible for the Euro and Social Dialogue, also in charge of Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, said: *"The agreement will help investment firms facilitate capital flows across the EU, while giving EU investors access to more choice and improved services. The EU is delivering a Capital Markets Union Agenda that puts proportionality at its heart, while never compromising on stability"*. Vice-President Jyrki **Katainen**, responsible for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness, said: *"This agreement is an important step in our strategy to build strong capital markets in the EU (the Capital Markets Union). It levels the playing field between the largest investment firms and the largest banks; they will follow the same rules, and puts in place a more proportionate prudential regime for the smaller ones. This is a major achievement which will deliver a suitable rulebook for EU investment firms and for the provision of services to EU clients by firms which are outside the Union"*. Full press release [online](#). (For more information: Annika Breidthardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153; Letizia Lupini – Tel.: +32 229 51958)

### **Capital Markets Union: Commission welcomes Member States' agreement on its proposal to make it easier for smaller businesses to access capital markets**

The European Commission welcomes the negotiating mandate agreed among EU Permanent Representatives on the proposed rules to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to tap market-based funding more easily and cheaply. Part of the [Capital Markets Union \(CMU\)](#) agenda, the new rules aim to reduce the administrative burden and high compliance costs faced by SMEs trying to list and issue securities on 'SME Growth Markets', a new category of trading venue dedicated to small issuers. The initiative will cut red tape for small businesses while ensuring a high level of market integrity and investor protection. It should also foster the liquidity of listed SME shares to make these markets more attractive for investors, issuers and intermediaries. Valdis **Dombrovskis**, Vice-President for the Euro and Social Dialogue, also in charge of Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, said: *"I am pleased that the Council has reached a general approach on this important Capital Markets Union proposal. Ensuring a proportional and robust regulatory environment is key for SMEs to grow and create jobs. The agreement reached in the Council today is an important step towards that goal. We now look forward to the Parliament and Council quickly adopting these measures to serve European SMEs and investors"*. Vice-President Jyrki **Katainen**, responsible for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness, said: *"Today's agreement in the Council is a step in the right direction, and I thank the Romanian Presidency for their diligent work. SMEs are central to growth and employment in the EU. The proposal tabled by the Commission should make it*

easier for European SMEs to invest in innovation and growth". [The proposal](#) was presented on 24 May 2018 and complements a comprehensive series of measures already adopted by the Commission since the launch of the CMU to improve access to market-based finance for SMEs. The Commission now calls on both the European Parliament and the Council to make all efforts to reach a final political agreement before the recess of the European Parliament. More information available [here](#). (For more information: Annika Breidhardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153; Letizia Lupini – Tel.: +32 229 51958)

## **EU and Pacific step up their cooperation on sustainable development**

At the occasion of a visit to the Pacific region, Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development Neven **Mimica** signed over €50 million support programmes for the Pacific in the sectors of water and sanitation, malnutrition, renewable energy, sustainable waste management, rural entrepreneurship and climate change adaptation. Commissioner **Mimica** said: *"The signature of these programmes totalling over €50 million reinforces once again the excellent partnership between the European Union and the Pacific. The EU has been continuously scaling up funds available for green investments in the Pacific region and across the globe."* The package includes €30 million to promote sustainable waste management and support climate change adaptation efforts in the Pacific, €18 million to support Government of Timor-Leste's efforts on malnutrition, and €1.6 million to reduce Palau's dependency on fossil fuel. The visit of the Commissioner is the occasion for the EU to reconfirm its commitment for a stronger dialogue with the Pacific region. During his two-day visit to Samoa, Commissioner **Mimica** also met with government representatives of the region and high-level partners on climate action. His trip to Samoa is part of a wider visit to the Pacific region, during which he announced [€50 million support](#) to the [Spotlight Initiative](#) to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in the Pacific and held [post-Cotonou talks with the Pacific](#). Photos and videos of the visit of the Commissioner are available on [EbS](#). (For more information: Carlos Martin Ruiz de Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Christina Wunder – Tel.: +32 229 92256)

## **Agriculture: new cross-border geographical indication from Croatia and Slovenia receives green light from the European Commission**

The Commission has approved today the addition of ['Istra'](#), an olive oil common to Croatia and Slovenia, to the register of Protected Designations of Origin (PDO). After 'Istarski pršut/Istrski pršut', a smoked ham registered in 2015, this is the second time Croatia and Slovenia agree to share a common PDO. 'Istra' is an extra virgin olive oil made from olives harvested and processed in the Istrian peninsula. The soil and climate of this region favour olive growing and the activity developed at a faster pace in the second half of the twentieth century. However, its roots are ancient and Roman amphorae discovered bore the inscriptions Oleil Histrici (Istrian oil) and Olei flos (first-press oil). The oil has a moderate to intense aroma of fresh olives with notes of fruit, vegetables or green vegetation of different intensities. The new denomination will be added to the list of over 1,440

products already protected. This is the 21st registered product (food, wine and spirits included) to be covering at least two Member States. 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)

## **Mergers: Commission approves RWE's acquisition of E.ON electricity generation assets**

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition by RWE of E.ON's renewable and nuclear electricity generation assets. RWE and E.ON are both energy companies based in Germany and are active across the whole electricity supply chain, from generation and wholesale to distribution and retail of electricity. As part of the asset swap, RWE would acquire (i) the majority of E.ON's renewable and nuclear generation assets and (ii) a 16.67% minority interest in E.ON as part payment for the assets it is selling to E.ON in the context of the asset swap. E.ON's acquisition of RWE's distribution and retail business is being assessed separately by the Commission and is still under review (case [M.8870](#)). The Commission assessed the impact of the transaction on the generation and wholesale supply of electricity. Its assessment focused on Germany, the main country where the activities of RWE and E.ON's electricity generation assets overlap. The Commission's investigation found that the transaction is: (a) unlikely to hinder effective competition in the generation and wholesale supply of electricity; (b) unlikely to affect RWE's ability and incentives to influence market prices through withholding electricity supply. The Commission therefore concluded that the transaction would raise no competition concerns as RWE would continue facing effective competition after the transaction on the markets for generation and wholesale supply of electricity, and cleared the case unconditionally. The full press release is available online in [EN](#), [DE](#), [FR](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **Vice-President Katainen and Commissioner Bulc in Turkey for High Level Economic Dialogue**

Tomorrow, Commission Vice-President Jyrki **Katainen**, responsible for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness will be in Istanbul, Turkey, together with Commissioner for Transport Violeta **Bulc**, to co-chair the EU-Turkey High Level Economic Dialogue with Turkish Minister of Treasury and Finance Mr Berat Albayrak. The Vice-President and the Commissioner will also meet Ms Ruhsar Pekcan, Minister of Trade, Mr Faruk Kaymakci, Deputy Minister of



Foreign Affairs, as well as EU and Turkish business representatives, to exchange on EU-Turkey economic, trade and investment relations. The meeting will be followed by a joint press conference. Later in the day, Commissioner **Bulc**, together with Turkish Minister of Transport and Infrastructure Mehmet Cahit Turhan, will witness the signature of the agreement on the new high-speed railway line Halkalı-Kapıkule. This largest ever EU-Turkey financial assistance project will directly connect Europe and Asia through Turkey. The following day, 29 February, Commissioner **Bulc** will meet Binali Yıldırım, Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, and participate in the Maritime Business Dialogue at the Turkish Chamber of Shipping. (*For more information: Annika Breidthardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153; Daniel Rosario – Tel.: +32 229 56185; Sophie Dupin de Saint-Cyr – Tel.: +32 229 56169; Stephan Meder – Tel.: +32 229 13917*)

### **Commissioner Moscovici in Athens for Citizens' Dialogue**

Pierre **Moscovici**, Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs, will be in Athens tomorrow, Thursday 28 February 2018, where he will participate in a Citizens Dialogue hosted by Mr Yiorgos Kaminis, Mayor of Athens, with students and professors from the Athens University of Economics and Business and the University of Piraeus. Commissioner **Moscovici** will meet Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras. He will also meet Mr Nikolaos Voutsis, President of the Hellenic Parliament, before delivering an address to members of the Hellenic Parliament. (*For more information: Annika Breidthardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153; Enda McNamara – Tel.: +32 229 64976*)

### **Commissioner Jourová to visit to Slovakia**

Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality Vera **Jourová** will be in Slovakia on Thursday and Friday, where she will discuss the state of play of Roma integration in the country. She will visit several schools, which are attended by Roma children, in the region of Kosice, as well as several projects supporting Roma integration that are financed through EU funds. She will then discuss the integration of Roma children in the Slovak education system both with a roundtable of stakeholders and with representatives of the Slovak government. Finally, Commissioner **Jourová** will meet the President of Slovakia, Andrej Kiska. (*For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Mélanie Voin – Tel.: +32 229 58659*)

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