

2018 SMSG application form

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[SMSG Expression of interest 30 November 2017](#)

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[Daily News 01 / 12 / 2017](#)

Investment Plan for Europe: largest financing amount to date for trains in Austria

The European Investment Bank (EIB) has signed an agreement under the Investment Plan in the transport sector today. The [€500 million loan](#) – the largest transaction under the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) to date – will allow Austrian train company ÖBB- Personenverkehr AG to purchase new rolling stock. ÖBB will use the loan to purchase new Cityjet train sets for local and regional services. European Commissioner for Transport Violeta **Bulc** said: *“This project not only supports investment and job creation in Europe, it also enables the transition to low emission mobility. These new trains will contribute to the attractiveness of the rail sector in Austria. All in all, this is good news for Austrian commuters and*

for the environment.” (For more information see the [Investment Plan website](#) or contact Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Siobhán Millbright – Tel.: +32 229 57361)

Global Forum agree on measures to tackle steel overcapacity

The Global Forum on Steel Excess Capacity bringing together 33 economies – all G20 members, some other interested OECD countries and all the world’s major steel producers – agreed yesterday in a meeting in Berlin on an ambitious package of concrete policy solutions to tackle the pressing issue of global overcapacity in the steel sector. According to the agreed package, Global Forum members must ensure market-based outcomes in the steel industry, refrain from market-distorting subsidies and other government support measures that contribute to overcapacity, provide a level playing field between state-owned and private companies, and enact effective adjustment policies. These steps are underpinned by a robust monitoring mechanism on capacity and policy developments to track implementation in 2018 and 2019. Commissioner for Trade Cecilia **Malmström** said: *“The problem of excess capacity of steel has real effects on people’s lives – especially those who become unemployed. This is a global challenge, and it has to be dealt with accordingly. In the run-up to the World Trade Organisation’s 11th Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires, this success underlines the importance of effective multilateral cooperation to solve global problems. Of course, our work is not yet done. Now we need to walk the talk.”* As a matter of priority, the Global Forum members should now ensure swift application of the agreed principles and recommendations and share – in the first half of 2018 – the information on the steps taken to eliminate market-distorting subsidies. The overcapacity issue was raised on several occasions by President Juncker at both bilateral and multilateral level, notably during the last two G20 Summits. Launched in December 2016 after a call by G20 Leaders in the Hangzhou, the Forum was reinforced by the outcomes of the July 2017 G20 Hamburg Summit. The Global Forum will continue meeting at least three times per year to monitor the implementation of the today’s commitments. The [press release](#) and a [report](#) are available online. (For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel.: +32 229 56185; Kinga Malinowska – Tel: +32 229 51383)

EU and its Arctic partners agree to prevent unregulated fishing in high seas

The European Union, together with partners engaged in Arctic matters (Canada, China, the Kingdom of Denmark, Iceland, Japan, Korea, Norway, the Russian Federation and the United States), last night succeeded in reaching an international agreement to prevent unregulated commercial fishing in the Arctic high seas. That is, until sufficient scientific information to support the sustainable exploitation of fish stocks in the region is available. The Arctic region is warming at almost twice the global average rate, causing a change in the size and distribution of fish stocks. As a result, the Arctic high seas potentially become more attractive for commercial fisheries in the medium to long term. However, until present, most of the Arctic high seas were not covered by any international conservation and management regime. The agreement, reached in Washington DC at the fifth and final round of

negotiations, will be a first step towards the creation of regional fisheries management organisations for the Central Arctic Ocean, to ensure that any future fishing is carried out sustainably. Karmenu **Vella**, Commissioner for the Environment, Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, said: *“The commitment and leadership shown by all parties have made it possible to reach this historic agreement. It will fill an important gap in the international ocean governance framework and will safeguard fragile marine ecosystems for future generations.”* The agreement is fully in line with the European Union’s long-standing position – emphasised recently at the EU-hosted [Our Ocean Conference](#) in Malta in October – that no commercial fisheries should begin in the Arctic high seas before a science-based and precautionary management regime is in place. Sound stewardship of the high seas has a prominent place in the EU’s [Arctic policy](#) and [Ocean Governance](#) policy, as regards a responsible approach towards utilizing Arctic marine resources, while respecting the rights of indigenous peoples. The agreement will enter into force when all ten Parties have signed and ratified the agreement. *(For more information: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: +32 229 56172; Iris Petsa – Tel.: +32 229 93321)*

Financial services: Commission follows up on the Call for Evidence and consults on supervisory reporting

The Commission is today following up on its stock-taking exercise of financial regulation with a new report on [Call for Evidence on EU financial services](#). The Call for Evidence was launched in 2015 to assess whether rules adopted since the financial crisis were working as intended. It led to new measures to make financial rules more proportionate and to reduce unnecessary regulatory constraints on market players. In this context, the Commission is today also launching a public [consultation](#) on supervisory reporting requirements. The aim is to assess the effectiveness of reporting, which supervisors in the EU need from financial market players. This consultation is a response to concerns raised in the Call for Evidence about the burden and costs that such requirements impose on market players. Valdis **Dombrovskis**, Vice President in charge of Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, said: *“With our Call for Evidence we were the first to assess the overall impact of financial services regulation on the market. We will continue to push for more coherent supervision and regulation across the board and ensure that EU financial services rules remain fit for purpose.”* Jyrki **Katainen**, Vice-President in charge of Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness said: *“The Call for Evidence confirmed that we can create better and more growth-friendly regulation. We can do so by developing and adjusting policies based on factual evidence and by involving interested parties. This in turn fosters job creation, growth and investment, while safeguarding financial stability and protecting both consumers and investors.”* More information on the [consultation](#) and the [report](#) can be found online. *(For more information: Lucía Caudet – Tel.: + 32 229 56182; Letizia Lupini – Tel.: +32 229 51958)*

La Commission approuve une nouvelle indication géographique protégée de Croatie

La Commission européenne a approuvé la demande d’inscription du [«Medimursko meso ‘z tiblice»](#) dans le registre des indications géographiques protégées

(IGP). Produit dans le comté de Međimurje dans le nord-ouest de la Croatie, la «Međimursko meso 'z tiblice» est une charcuterie à base de viande de porc salée et assaisonnée et d'une préparation de lard appelé «slanina». Dans la région de Međimurje, l'élevage porcin a toujours été le secteur d'élevage le plus important et l'est resté jusqu'à aujourd'hui. La spécificité du «Međimursko meso 'z tiblice» résulte précisément de son mode traditionnel de préparation qui consiste à superposer des couches successives de viande de porc et de slanina jusqu'au sommet du récipient. Cette nouvelle appellation va rejoindre plus de 1415 produits déjà protégés dont la liste est disponible dans la base de données [DOOR](#). Pour plus d'informations, voir aussi les pages sur la [politique de qualité](#). (pour plus d'information: Daniel Rosario – Tel: +32 2 29 56185; Clémence Robin – Tel: +32 229 52 509)

Mergers: Commission approves acquisition of joint control over SMATRICS and E-Mobility Provider Austria by VERBUND and OMV

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of joint control over SMATRICS GmbH & Co KG and E-Mobility Provider Austria GmbH, the latter being the unlimited partner of SMATRICS, by VERBUND AG and OMV Aktiengesellschaft, all of Austria. SMATRICS provides e-mobility services across Austria and will constitute a full-function joint venture operating on the market autonomously. E-mobility services are needed for operating electric vehicles, including for example the provision of charging infrastructure. VERBUND is an electricity supply company, whose core business includes generating and transmitting electricity, as well as electricity trading. OMV is an integrated oil and gas company, active across the entire crude oil and natural gas value chain. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns because of the limited overlap between the companies' activities and the negligible actual or foreseen activities of the joint venture in the European Economic Area. The transaction was examined under the simplified merger review procedure. More information is available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the public [case register](#) under the case number [M.8618](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Sarantopoulou – Tel.: +32 229 13740)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of three regional savings banks in Italy by Cariparma.

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of three Italian savings banks (Cassa di Risparmio di Cesena S.p.A., Cassa di Risparmio di Rimini S.p.A. and Cassa di Risparmio di San Miniato S.p.A.) by Crédit Agricole Cariparma S.p.A. ("Cariparma"), also of Italy. The three banks being acquired are mainly active in retail banking in North and Central Italy. Cariparma, an Italian subsidiary of Crédit Agricole S.A., is a provider of a complete range of financial services in Italy. The acquisition is taking place in the context of an agreement with the Voluntary Scheme of the Interbank Deposit Fund. The Commission concluded that the proposed transaction would raise no competition concerns because there are only minor horizontal overlaps or vertical relationships between the combined activities of these four banks. The transaction was examined under the simplified merger review procedure. More information is available on the

Commission's [competition](#) website, in the public [case register](#) under the case number [M.8639](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Sarantopoulou – Tel.: +32 229 13740)

Eurostat: R&D expenditure in the EU remained stable in 2016 at just over 2% of GDP

In 2016, the Member States of the European Union (EU) spent all together over €300 billion on Research & Development (R&D). The R&D intensity, i.e. R&D expenditure as a percentage of GDP, remained stable at 2.03% in 2016. Ten years ago (2006), R&D intensity was 1.76%. A Eurostat press release is available [here](#). (For more information: Lucia Caudet – Tel.: +32 229 56182; Maud Noyan – Tel.: +32 229 80379)

STATEMENTS

International Day of Persons with Disabilities: Statement by Commissioner Thyssen

“By 2020, one in five Europeans is expected to experience some degree of disability. Enabling people with disabilities to participate fully in society is one of the major societal challenges we face – there is still a long way to go in fighting the social exclusion of people with disabilities. Inclusive growth and social fairness are at the core of the European Commission’s agenda, as confirmed by the recent proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. [...] The European Union continues to stand by its obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. As part of the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020 this European Commission has notably taken important initiatives to help removing barriers to accessibility for people with disabilities. Two years ago I presented my proposal for a [European Accessibility Act](#), which aims at making key products and services accessible for people with disabilities. It is now high time for my proposal to be adopted by all EU institutions.” The full statement can be found [here](#). On 4 and 5 December, the Commission organises a European Day for People with Disabilities, including the yearly Access City Award ceremony. More information on both events is available [here](#). (For more information: Christian Wigand– Tel.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: + 32 229 67094)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Vice-President Ansip and Commissioner Gabriel at Telecoms Council to urge progress in spectrum coordination

On Monday, Ministers in charge of Transport, Telecommunications and Energy issues will discuss several key digital and telecoms files. Both Vice-President for Digital Single Market Andrus **Ansip** and Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society Mariya **Gabriel** are participating in the Council meeting to urge Ministers to progress on key legislation – the [European Electronic Communications Code](#) and spectrum coordination. Vice-President **Ansip** said: *“Without coordinated spectrum, we will be lagging behind in deploying 5G and rolling out IoT solutions. Hence, I welcome the calls from EU leaders to*

agree on the new telecoms code as soon as possible. We cannot afford losing more time.” Commissioner **Gabriel** said: “High-speed connectivity and good spectrum coordination are the backbone of the Digital Single Market. Europe has a lot to win with the new telecoms rules. The direct benefits vary from economic growth to improved health care and intelligent energy consumption based on real-time needs.” Other topics touched upon on the Council meeting will be the [free flow of non-personal data](#), future investment policy for digitalisation beyond 2020, and the progress report on the proposed [e-Privacy rules](#). The Council will also adopt a general approach on the [BEREC Regulation](#), which will strengthen EU level coordination of electronic communications. The Ministers will additionally be updated on the Council Conclusions and Action Plan on Cybersecurity ([see more on cyber security](#)) and the incoming Bulgarian Presidency will present its work programme. More information on spectrum coordination is available in the factsheets on [spectrum](#) and [connectivity](#). An overview of the Digital Single Market is available in the [state of play factsheet](#); additional factsheets can be found [here](#). (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Inga Höglund – Tel.: +32 229 50698)

La Coalition pour les compétences et les emplois numériques célèbre sa première année de réalisations

[La Coalition pour les compétences et les emplois numériques](#) a été lancée il y a exactement un an avec les États membres, les entreprises, les partenaires sociaux, les ONG et les professionnels de l'éducation pour répondre à la forte demande en matière de compétences numériques en Europe. La Commission européenne organisera le 7 décembre une [conférence](#) à Bruxelles pour marquer cette étape et discuter des progrès réalisés jusqu'à présent. Au cours de la conférence, Mariya **Gabriel**, commissaire à l'économie et à la société numériques, présentera sa vision de la future politique sur les compétences numériques et lancera officiellement l'initiative de “[stages pour des opportunités numériques](#)”. Ce projet pilote offrira des stages dans un autre pays de l'UE à plus de 6 000 étudiants et récemment diplômés en 2018-2020. La commissaire remettra également les [Prix européens 2017 sur les compétences numériques](#) à cinq projets exceptionnels qui ont renforcé les compétences numériques des Européens dans quatre catégories: les compétences numériques pour les citoyens, les compétences numériques pour la main-d'œuvre, les compétences numériques pour les professionnels des technologies de l'information et de la communication (TIC) et les compétences numériques dans l'éducation. Un prix spécial sera décerné à l'un des projets qui promeut les compétences numériques chez les femmes et les jeunes filles afin de souligner l'importance qu'il y a à combler l'écart entre les sexes dans le secteur numérique. La conférence comprendra des panels sur les investissements futurs nécessaires dans les compétences numériques. En outre, des ateliers interactifs se concentreront sur la manière de sensibiliser les citoyens ainsi que les petites et moyennes entreprises aux compétences numériques, et sur des solutions pour mieux les introduire dans l'éducation. Les journalistes peuvent s'inscrire à l'événement [ici](#). Plus de détails et le programme complet sont disponibles [ici](#). Plus d'informations sur les finalistes des Prix européens sur les compétences numériques 2017 sont disponibles [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tél. : +32

[Calendar](#)

The Commissioners' Weekly Activities

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

European Commission ready to consider further Macro-Financial Assistance to Ukraine, provided reform momentum is stepped up

The EU has supported Ukraine in many ways, particularly in view of the conflict that began in 2014 and at the peak of its balance-of-payments crisis. In addition to political support, the EU has pledged a **€12.8 billion support package** to support the reform process including through unprecedented disbursements via the EU's Macro-Financial Assistance (MFA) instrument to help the country cover its external financing needs. Ukraine is – and will remain – one of the EU's key partners. As such, the EU will continue to stand by Ukraine and its citizens as the country further progresses with its reforms and economic adjustment.

A primary instrument in the EU's overall strategy vis-a-vis Ukraine was to provide €1.8 billion in MFA via the programme approved in April 2015, from which €1.2 billion have already been disbursed in two tranches. The MFA programme has also fostered the implementation of a wide-ranging structural reform agenda that has sought to tackle key challenges, in line with Ukraine's own domestic reform programme and the objectives set out in the Association Agreement, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. The availability of this current MFA programme expires at the beginning of January 2018.

As regards the third and final tranche of MFA, Ukraine has fulfilled a large share of the policy commitments agreed with the EU. This includes important measures to increase transparency in public finance management; to launch public administration, judicial and governance reform; to advance ongoing reforms of the energy sectors, improve the business environment and reinforce social safety nets. These structural reforms will benefit Ukraine's citizens, which is the ultimate objective of the EU's assistance.

Four of the measures linked to the third and final tranche of this MFA currently remain outstanding. Against this background, the Commission is not in a position to disburse the last tranche of the current MFA programme. We

encourage Ukraine to maintain the reform momentum in the many areas that have progressed well, and complete the measures outstanding under the current programme, with the support of all stakeholders.

At a meeting between European Commission Jean-Claude **Juncker** and President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko in the margins of the Eastern Partnership Summit, which took place in Brussels on 24 November 2017, President Poroshenko expressed an interest in further MFA from the EU. President Juncker expressed his openness in this regard. From Ukraine's side, reinforcing the reform momentum and resisting internal pressures for policy reversals on important reforms will be crucial, particularly over the coming months.

The Commission stands ready to assess the relevance of a successor MFA operation and, if judged warranted, to present a proposal for a new MFA operation in early 2018. An economic assessment, including of external financing needs, will have to be conducted and the details of this proposal would have to be worked out. Moreover, it will be important to ensure that the country's IMF programme remains on track. Any proposal would be subject to the approval of the European Parliament and of the Council of the EU, as per normal legislative practice.

Background

Macrofinancial assistance (MFA) operations are part of the EU's wider engagement with neighbouring countries and are intended as an exceptional EU crisis response instrument. They are available to EU neighbour countries experiencing severe balance-of-payments problems. In addition to MFA, the EU supports Ukraine through several other instruments, including humanitarian aid, budget support, technical assistance and blending facilities to support investment.

Following Ukraine's request in late 2014 for additional financial assistance as a result of the deterioration of its macroeconomic situation, the Commission proposed an MFA operation of up to €1.8 billion on 8 January 2015 with the objective of alleviating the country's external financing needs. The Commission proposal was adopted by the co-legislators on 15 April 2015. The Memorandum of Understanding and Loan Facility Agreement attached to the third EU MFA programme were signed by Ukraine and the EU on 22 May 2015 in Riga. The two documents were ratified by the Ukrainian Parliament on 18 June 2015 and entered into force on 3 July 2015. The first tranche under this new programme (€600 million) was disbursed on 22 July 2015, while the second tranche (also €600 million) was released on 4 April 2017.

Ukraine has so far benefitted from a total of €2.81 billion worth of EU MFA loans since the onset of the crisis in early 2014. This includes €1.61 billion disbursed in 2014-2015 as part of two earlier MFA operations, and €1.2 billion as part of the third, ongoing operation.

Further Information

[European Commission support for Ukraine](#)

[EU-Ukraine relations](#)

[EU Delegation to Ukraine website](#)

[Information on MFA operations, including annual reports](#)

[EU investor relations website](#)

International Day of Persons with disabilities: Statement by Commissioner Thyssen

Enabling people with disabilities to participate fully in society is one of the major societal challenges we face – there is still a long way to go in fighting the social exclusion of people with disabilities.

Inclusive growth and social fairness are at the core of the European Commission's agenda, as confirmed by the recent proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. The European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council have committed to the principle that people with disabilities have the right to income support that ensures living in dignity, services that enable them to participate in the labour market and in society, and a work environment adapted to their needs. The Commission's efforts therefore need to be flanked by actions from national, regional and local authorities to make sure that people with disabilities are not left behind. And the continued involvement of civil society and business organisations will be indispensable.

The European Union continues to stand by its obligations under the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#). As part of the [European Disability Strategy 2010-2020](#) this European Commission has notably taken important initiatives to help removing barriers to accessibility for people with disabilities. Two years ago I presented my proposal for a [European Accessibility Act](#), which aims at making key products and services accessible for people with disabilities. It is now high time for my proposal to be adopted by all EU institutions. The European Parliament has defined its position in September, and I am confident that Member States will reach an agreement at the upcoming Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) meeting on 7 December. 2018 must be a year of delivery for the Accessibility Act, which will bring concrete improvements to so many people's lives.

The International Day of Persons with Disabilities offers an excellent opportunity for the voices of people with disabilities to be heard. Therefore, the European Commission organises the [European Day of Persons with](#)

[Disabilities conference](#), on 4 and 5 December. I hope I can count on broad support and interest from all actors. Together we will look ahead and discuss ways to build a more inclusive, social and accessible society.

For More Information

[Press release: Commission proposes to make products and services more accessible to disabled persons](#)

[DG Employment webpage on persons with disabilities](#)

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