

[Daily News 20 / 07 / 2017](#)

Customs Union: EU customs seized over 41 million fake goods at EU borders last year

New figures released by the European Commission today show that customs authorities detained more than 41 million fake and counterfeit products at the EU's external border in 2016. The goods had a total value of over €670 million. Everyday products which are potentially dangerous to health and safety – such as food and drink, medicines, toys and household electrical goods – accounted for over a third of all intercepted goods. Pierre **Moscovici**, Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs, said: *“A high level of protection of intellectual property is crucial to support growth and create jobs. Fake goods pose a real threat to health and safety of EU consumers and also undermine legal businesses and state revenues. Studies show that the EU is particularly exposed to imports of counterfeit products. I want to pay tribute to the hard work of customs authorities in combating these fake goods. They need support and resources to enable them to protect us all from the dangers that they can pose. Cooperation between law enforcement authorities should be strengthened and risk management systems upgraded to protect the EU from goods infringing on intellectual property rights.”* Cigarettes were the top category (24%) for articles detained and toys the second largest group (17%), followed by foodstuffs (13%) and packaging material (12%). The number of intercepted articles rose by 2% compared to 2015. The Commission's report on customs actions to enforce IPR has been issued annually since 2000 and is based on data transmitted by Member States' customs administrations to the Commission. The data provide valuable information which supports the analysis of intellectual property rights infringements and helps other institutions such as the European Union Intellectual Property Office and the OECD to map economic data and the most common routes for counterfeiters. A more detailed press release is available [here](#). The full report can be consulted [here](#). (For more information: Vanessa Mock – Tel.: +32 229 56194; Patrick McCullough – Tel.: +32 229 87183)

Juncker Plan backs upgrades to the University of Latvia's campus and enhanced access to finance for SMEs

The [Juncker Plan](#) has backed European Investment Bank Group loan agreements with the University of Latvia and ProCredit, a bank which specialises in lending to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Both agreements, made in two separate transactions, were made possible by the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), the central pillar of the Investment Plan for Europe, the so-called “Juncker Plan”. The loan to the University of Latvia will finance the construction of new state-of-the-art facilities for the University's science, social and humanities faculties. The agreement with ProCredit is expected to generate some EUR 450 million in financing for SMEs. Commenting on the agreement with the University of Latvia, Vice-President of the European Commission, Valdis **Dombrovskis** said: *“Investing today in the facilities our students need to realise their full potential is an investment*

in our future economic growth. Today's agreement demonstrates that the Juncker Plan can deliver for jobs and growth whilst also contributing to wider objectives, such as ensuring that Europe maintains its competitiveness in research and innovation. I trust that these new facilities will serve generations of Latvian students and will help them to excel." As of June 2017, the Juncker Plan is expected to trigger over EUR 390 million in investments in Latvia and EUR 209 billion across Europe. For the latest figures country-by-country, see [here](#). Full press releases are available [here](#). (For more information: Vanessa Mock – Tel.: +32 229 56194; Enda McNamara – Tel.: +32 229 64976)

L'Union européenne apporte un soutien de €100 millions à la Tunisie

La Commission européenne, au nom de l'Union européenne (UE), a versé aujourd'hui à la Tunisie [un prêt de €100 millions](#), dix jours après avoir donné le feu vert à ce déboursement. Il s'agit de la troisième et dernière tranche du programme d'assistance macrofinancière (AMF-I) à la Tunisie d'un montant total de €300 millions, adopté en [mai 2014](#). Ce financement fait partie des efforts globaux de l'UE visant à aider la Tunisie à faire face aux graves difficultés économiques que le pays rencontre et à l'instabilité politique qui persiste dans la région. Il soutient le processus de relance économique de la Tunisie tant par l'octroi à ce pays de financements à des conditions préférentielles que par l'encouragement de la mise en œuvre de plusieurs mesures importantes de politique publique convenues dans un protocole d'accord entre l'UE et la Tunisie. Les fonds nécessaires ont été levés par la Commission européenne sur les marchés financiers grâce à l'émission d'une obligation de €100 millions avec une échéance de 15 ans et un taux d'intérêt de 1,3%. Ce prêt a été alloué à la Tunisie sous les mêmes conditions. Pierre **Moscovici**, Commissaire pour les affaires économiques et financières, la fiscalité et les douanes, a déclaré: « Ce versement est une autre démonstration du soutien fort de l'UE à la Tunisie dans la poursuite de ses efforts de réformes. L'UE est déterminée à soutenir le peuple tunisien, ainsi que le processus de transition démocratique du pays. » Le [deuxième programme d'assistance macrofinancière](#) (AMF-II) s'élève à un montant de €500 millions sous la forme de prêts. Cet octroi de fonds a été approuvé par le Parlement européen et le Conseil le 6 juillet 2016 et le versement devrait avoir lieu au cours de l'année 2017 ainsi qu'au premier semestre de 2018. (Pour plus d'informations: Vanessa Mock – Tel.: +32 2 295 61 94; Barbara Ochotnicka – Tel.: +32 2 291 37 54)

EU steps up humanitarian assistance in Libya

The European Commission has today announced an additional €10 million in humanitarian aid for those most in need in Libya as violence and instability continue to affect vulnerable populations. This is part of the EU's broader support for Libya to address the ongoing crisis in the country, which includes funding of €220 million allocated through various support programmes, including the [EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa](#). "The European Commission is stepping up support for the worrying humanitarian situation in Libya. Our new funding aims to help humanitarian organisations respond to

urgent needs, especially in terms of access to emergency health services and essential medicines. We urge all parties to the conflict to ensure immediate, safe and unrestricted humanitarian access so all in need receive lifesaving assistance. We stand by all those suffering as a result of the conflict and are committed to pursuing our impartial and neutral humanitarian response to help those that need it most.” said Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos **Stylianides**. A full press release is available [here](#). (For more information: Carlos Martín Ruiz de Gordejuela – Tel.: + 32 229 65322; Daniel Puglisi – Tel.: +32 229 69140)

La Commission lance une consultation publique sur les soins de santé dans le marché unique numérique

Aujourd’hui, la Commission européenne lance une consultation publique sur la manière dont l’Union européenne devrait promouvoir l’innovation numérique dans le secteur des soins de santé, au profit des citoyens et des systèmes de santé en Europe. La consultation contribuera à l’adoption d’une nouvelle communication d’ici la fin de 2017, comme annoncé dans [l’examen](#) récent de la stratégie pour un marché unique numérique de la Commission. En accueillant l’initiative, le vice-président Andrus **Ansip** et les commissaires Vytenis **Andriukaitis**, Mariya **Gabriel** et Carlos **Moedas** ont déclaré: *“Nous sommes engagés dans l’amélioration de la qualité de vie des citoyens européens en améliorant les systèmes de santé, de soins et de recherche en Europe en utilisant le plein potentiel des technologies numériques. Cette consultation nous aidera à identifier les moyens d’offrir aux citoyens, aux professionnels de santé et aux chercheurs un meilleur accès aux données sur la santé, à la prévention, aux réponses rapides face aux menaces pandémiques, aux traitements et soins personnalisés. Nous envisageons de nouvelles initiatives numériques visant à assurer la libre circulation des patients et des données, à soutenir la modernisation des systèmes de santé nationaux et à agréger des données et des connaissances novatrices de toute l’Europe. Au cœur de nos politiques, les citoyens et leur bien-être restent notre première priorité”*. Un communiqué de presse est disponible en [ligne](#). Plus d’informations [ici](#) et la page principale consacrée à la consultation [ici](#). (Pour plus d’informations: Anca Paduraru – Tel.: +32 229-91269; Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Iris Petsa – Tel.: + 32 229 93321; Mirna Talko – Tél.: +32 229 87278)

EU reinforces its strong partnership with Colombia, focussing on rural reforms

Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven **Mimica**, reaffirms the EU’s strong and long-standing partnership with Colombia during an official visit to Colombiatomorrow, where he will meet with President Juan Manuel **Santos**. At the heart of this partnership stands the EU’s commitment to support the implementation of the Colombian peace agreement, with a particular emphasis on comprehensive rural reforms. In this context, Commissioner **Mimica** said: *“Restoring rural areas that were affected by the prolonged armed conflict is at the heart of Colombia’s peace agreement, and an important priority for our development cooperation with the country. Together with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, we will support Colombia’s efforts to build lasting peace by strengthening rural*

communities and agricultural productivity". Commissioner **Mimica**, together with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, will launch a joint initiative for Colombia. Through this initiative, the EU will support the Colombian government institutions that are involved in food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture by means of targeted policy assistance and capacity building. These actions will help to implement the comprehensive rural reform, which is one of the priorities of the Peace Agreement signed in November 2016. The initiative can be considered a significant step forward towards achieving sustainable development in the country, as it focuses in particular on improving the situation of the poor in rural areas, the capacity of the State in conflict-affected areas, and rural development. Commissioner Mimica will also participate in the fair [AgroExpo](#) in Bogota. Read the full press release [here](#). (For more information: Carlos Martin Ruiz De Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Christina Wunder – Tel.: +32 229 92256)

Nouvelle proposition visant à réduire les substances cancérigènes dans les aliments

Les représentants des États membres ont voté hier en faveur de la proposition de la Commission européenne visant à réduire la présence d'[acrylamide](#) – une substance cancérigène – dans les denrées alimentaires. Une fois mis en œuvre, le nouveau règlement exigera des exploitants du secteur alimentaire (ESA) qu'ils appliquent des mesures obligatoires, proportionnées à la taille et à la nature de leur établissement, afin de réduire la présence d'acrylamide. Le commissaire pour la santé et la sécurité alimentaire, Vytenis **Andriukaitis**, s'est félicité de ce vote: «*Nous avons franchi un pas important dans la protection de la santé et du bien-être des citoyens. Le nouveau règlement permettra non seulement de réduire la présence de cette substance cancérigène, mais contribuera à sensibiliser l'opinion publique à la manière d'éviter l'exposition à ladite substance, qui est souvent liée à la cuisine domestique.*» La Commission a également l'intention d'entamer des discussions sur des mesures supplémentaires, telles que la fixation de teneurs maximales en acrylamide dans certaines denrées alimentaires. Le texte approuvé va maintenant être transmis au Conseil et au Parlement européen avec un délai d'examen de trois mois avant son adoption finale par la Commission. Un communiqué de presse dans toutes les langues est disponible [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Anca Paduraru – Tel.: +32 229-91269; Iris Petsa – Tel.: + 32 229 93321)

Agriculture: Commission launches crops' market observatory

The Commission launched today a market observatory for crops to ensure more transparency and increase availability of market data for European farmers and traders. A range of market information and short-term analysis will be made available on a new [dedicated website](#). The observatory consists of 14 organisations representing various stages of the grain supply chain. A board of 23 market experts will meet twice a year, chaired by the Commission. Speaking at the [inaugural meeting](#), Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development Phil **Hogan** said: "*Today's meeting is the fulfilment of a commitment to extend to the crops sector the successful story of the Market*

Observatories for Milk, Meat and Sugar. The EU Crops sector plays a key role for the global competitiveness of European agriculture. It is therefore our ambition for the Observatory to become an additional and useful tool to manage the market more effectively". Crops production is an essential part of the EU farming activity, with over 300 million tonnes of cereals, 30 million tonnes of oilseeds and five million tonnes of protein crops produced every year. (For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel.: + 32 229 56185; Kinga Malinowska – Tel.: +32 229 51383)

Mergers: Commission clears the creation of a mobile payments joint venture by Bitė, Tele2 and Telia in Lithuania

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the creation of a joint venture by UAB Bitė Lietuva (Bitė), UAB Tele2 (Tele2) and Telia Lietuva AB (Telia), all of Lithuania. The joint venture will provide mobile payment services to businesses and consumers in Lithuania. Bitė is controlled by the US investment firm Providence Equity. Tele2 is part of the Tele2 Group, ultimately controlled by the Swedish investment company Kinnevik. Telia is part of the Swedish Telia Company AB. Bitė, Tele2 and Telia are active in the supply of retail mobile telecommunications services in Lithuania. In addition, Telia provides colocation services in Lithuania, hosting other companies' servers in its data centers. The Commission assessed the impact of the transaction on the nascent market for mobile payment services in Lithuania. The Commission concluded that the transaction would raise no competition concerns given the minor overlap between the joint venture's envisaged activities and the parents' potential activities in the supply of mobile payment services. Moreover, the Commission found that the joint venture's parents would not have the ability, or incentive, to shut out rivals, in particular due to the presence of alternative means for competitors of the joint venture to securely store information and to authenticate users. The transaction was examined under the normal merger review procedure. More information is available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the public [case register](#) under the case number [M.8251](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Sarantopoulou – Tel.: +32 229 13740)

Concentrations: La Commission autorise l'acquisition de GE Water par Suez

La Commission européenne a autorisé, en vertu du règlement européen sur les concentrations, le projet d'acquisition de GE Water and Process Technologies, basée aux Etats-Unis, par SUEZ S.A., basée en France. GE Water est actif dans la fourniture de produits chimiques et d'équipement de systèmes de traitement des eaux pour des clients industriels ainsi que des municipalités. Suez fournit des solutions de gestion des eaux, de recyclage et de récupération des eaux usées, ainsi que des systèmes de développement urbain. La Commission a conclu que l'acquisition envisagée ne soulèverait pas de problèmes de concurrence car il y existe un nombre suffisant de fournisseurs alternatifs sur les marchés de la fourniture de services mobiles de traitement des eaux et de la fourniture de produits chimiques, où GE Water et Suez sont des concurrents directs. GE Water est aussi un fournisseur de membranes utilisées

dans les usines de traitement des eaux et eaux usées que Suez produit. La Commission a conclu que les entreprises n'auraient ni l'incitation ni la capacité d'exclure les concurrents du marché des membranes. L'opération a été examinée dans le cadre de la procédure normale du contrôle des concentrations. De plus amples informations sont disponibles sur le [site internet](#) concurrence de la Commission, dans le [registre public](#) des affaires sous le numéro d'affaire [M.8452](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Sarantopoulou – Tel.: +32 229 13740)

Concentrations: la Commission autorise l'acquisition du contrôle conjoint de NextDoor par Bouygues Immobilier et Accor

La Commission européenne a approuvé, en vertu du règlement européen sur les concentrations, l'acquisition du contrôle conjoint de la société NextDoor par les sociétés Bouygues Immobilier S.A.S. et Accor S.A., toutes trois basées en France. NextDoor a pour activité la mise à disposition et commercialisation d'espaces de travail intelligents et collaboratifs destinés aux entreprises, assortis d'un ensemble de services d'affaires. Bouygues Immobilier intervient dans les différents domaines de la promotion immobilière et développe des projets de logements, d'immeubles de bureaux et de parcs commerciaux. Accor est actif dans le secteur de l'hôtellerie. La Commission a conclu que la concentration envisagée ne soulèverait pas de problème de concurrence compte tenu de son impact très limité sur la structure du marché. L'opération a été examinée dans le cadre de la procédure simplifiée du contrôle des concentrations. De plus amples informations sont disponibles sur le site internet [concurrence](#) de la Commission, dans le [registre public](#) des affaires sous le numéro d'affaire [M.8534](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Sarantopoulou – Tel.: +32 229 13740)

Eurostat: Comment l'Union européenne progresse-t-elle vers ses objectifs Europe 2020? – Un tableau contrasté

La stratégie Europe 2020, adoptée par le Conseil européen en juin 2010, est l'agenda de l'Union européenne en matière d'emploi et de croissance pour la décennie en cours. La stratégie s'est fixée comme but principal d'assurer des niveaux élevés d'emploi, de productivité et de cohésion sociale dans les États membres, tout en réduisant l'impact sur notre environnement naturel. Afin d'atteindre ce but, l'UE a adopté des objectifs, à atteindre d'ici 2020, couvrant cinq domaines: l'emploi, la recherche & développement (R&D), le changement climatique & l'énergie, l'éducation ainsi que la réduction de la pauvreté. Ceux-ci ont été traduits en objectifs nationaux afin de refléter la situation et les possibilités de contribution de chaque État membre à l'objectif commun. Un ensemble de neuf [indicateurs clés](#) et des sous-indicateurs complémentaires, compilés par Eurostat, donnent un aperçu de la distance à laquelle se trouve l'UE dans l'atteinte de ses objectifs. Un communiqué de presse est disponible [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: + 32 229 67094)

Eurostat: Déficit public désaisonnalisé en baisse à 0,9% du PIB dans la zone euro

Au premier trimestre 2017, le ratio du déficit public par rapport au PIB, corrigé des variations saisonnières, s'est établi à 0,9% dans la zone euro (ZE19), en baisse par rapport au quatrième trimestre 2016 où il se situait à 1,1%. Dans l'UE28, le ratio du déficit public par rapport au PIB s'est établi à 1,0%, contre 1,2% au trimestre précédent. Un communiqué de presse est disponible [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Barbara Ochotnicka – Tel.: +32 229 13754)

Eurostat: Premier trimestre 2017 par rapport au quatrième trimestre 2016 – La dette publique en hausse à 89,5% du PIB dans la zone euro

À la fin du premier trimestre 2017, le ratio de la dette publique par rapport au PIB s'est établi à 89,5% dans la zone euro (ZE19), contre 89,2% à la fin du quatrième trimestre 2016. Dans l'UE28, le ratio a également augmenté, passant de 83,6% à 84,1%. Par rapport au premier trimestre 2016, le ratio de la dette publique par rapport au PIB a baissé dans la zone euro (de 91,2% à 89,5%) ainsi que dans l'UE28 (de 84,3% à 84,1%). Un communiqué de presse est disponible [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Vanessa Mock – Tel.: +32 229 56194; Barbara Ochotnicka – Tel.: +32 229 13754)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini travels to Kuwait

At the invitation of the Emir of Kuwait, EU High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini will travel to Kuwait on July 23 to discuss the situation in the Gulf and mark the EU's full support for Kuwait's ongoing mediation efforts. The HR/VP will notably meet with H.H. the Emir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah of Kuwait, Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Khalid Al-Hamad Al-Sabah and Sheikh Mohammad Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al-Sabah, Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs of Kuwait and Emissary for the Gulf crisis, as well as with H.E. Marzouq Al-Ghanem, Speaker of the National Assembly of Kuwait. Photos and videos of the visit will be available on [EbS](#). (For more information: Maja Kocijancic – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Lauranne Devillé – Tel.: +32 229 80833)

Central Mediterranean Route: Commissioner Avramopoulos in Tunis for Ministerial Meeting

Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris **Avramopoulos** will be in Tunis on Sunday and Monday for the second Ministerial Meeting on the Central Mediterranean Route alongside interior ministers from Algeria, Austria, Chad, Egypt, France, Germany, Italy, Libya, Mali, Malta,

Niger, Slovenia, Switzerland and Tunisia, as well as Estonia which holds the Presidency of the European Union. Discussions will focus on ways to strengthen cooperation between both sides of the Mediterranean as well as between Libya and all its neighbours with a view to saving lives at sea and in the desert, stemming irregular migration, fighting against smugglers and traffickers in human beings, protecting migrants and refugees' rights, and increasing cooperation on border management along the Central Mediterranean Route. A press conference is scheduled to take place on Monday 24 July and will be broadcast on EbS. (*For more information: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456; Markus Lammert – Tel.: +32 229 58602*)

Le Commissaire Moscovici rencontre les autorités françaises à Paris demain

Pierre **Moscovici**, Commissaire aux affaires économiques et financières, à la fiscalité et aux douanes sera à Paris le vendredi 21 juillet. Il s'entretiendra avec le Premier ministre, M. Édouard Philippe; le ministre de l'Économie et des Finances, M. Bruno Le Maire; et le ministre de l'Action et des Comptes publics, M. Gérard Darmanin. Le Commissaire Moscovici a dit: *“La France s'est engagée à corriger son déficit excessif dès cette année. C'est ce que ses partenaires européens attendent d'elle et c'est à portée de main. J'en discuterai avec les autorités françaises ce vendredi. Nous évoquerons également la préparation du projet de budget 2018 qui devra confirmer dans la durée la crédibilité budgétaire de la France en Europe.”* (*Pour plus d'information: Vanessa Mock – Tel.: +32 229 56194; Patrick McCullough – Tel.: +32 229 87183*)

[Calendar](#)

The Commissioners' weekly activities

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

[Acrylamide: un vote en faveur de la proposition de la Commission visant à en réduire la présence dans les denrées alimentaires](#)

Roaming charges ended in the European Union on 15 June 2017. Europeans travelling within EU countries will 'Roam Like at Home' and pay domestic prices for roaming calls, SMS and data. ...

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[Acrylamid: Zustimmung zum Vorschlag der Kommission zur Reduzierung des Gehalts in Lebensmitteln](#)

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[Acrylamide: vote in favour of Commission's proposal to reduce presence in food](#)

Once implemented, the new regulation will require that food business operators (FBOs) apply mandatory measures to reduce the presence of acrylamide, proportionate to the size and nature of their establishment.

Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, Vytenis **Andriukaitis**, welcomed the vote: *"Today we took an important step in protecting the health and well-being of citizens. The new regulation will not only help to reduce the presence of this carcinogenic substance but also will help raise awareness on how to avoid the exposure to it that oftentimes comes from home-cooking."*

The text agreed today will now be sent to the Council and the European Parliament. The two institutions will have three months to examine it before final adoption by the Commission. The entry into force could be foreseen spring 2018.

The Commission is also planning to initiate discussions on additional measures, such as setting maximum levels of acrylamide in certain foods without delay once this Regulation is adopted.

Background

Acrylamide [\[1\]](#) is a carcinogenic substance that forms from naturally present free asparagine (amino acid) and sugars during high temperature processing,

such as frying, roasting and baking, particularly in potato-based products, cereal-based products, coffee and coffee substitutes.

The presence of acrylamide in food was initially detected in 2002 and since then research was undertaken to identify measures to reduce its presence in food. The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) confirmed in 2015 that acrylamide is a carcinogenic substance and that current levels of dietary exposure to acrylamide indicate a concern with respect to the carcinogenic effects. EFSA also stated that the levels of acrylamide were not consistently decreased in recent years. In addition, the investigations performed by the Member States on the basis of the Commission Recommendation showed that the implementation by food business operators of the voluntary mitigation measures to reduce the presence varied widely.

Following EFSA's opinion, the Commission started discussions with Member States' authorities to determine appropriate regulatory measures to reduce the presence of acrylamide in food.

[1]

https://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/chemical_safety/contaminants/catalogue/acrylamide_en

Text of the draft proposal available

here: http://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/initiatives/ares-2017-2895100_en

Opening remarks of First Vice-President Frans Timmermans: College readout on grave concerns about the clear risks for independence of the judiciary in Poland

As you know, the Commission already concluded in our 2016 Recommendations that there is a systemic threat to the rule of law in Poland.

Let me recall that the Commission's concerns are shared equally by the European Parliament and the Council, as well as by the Council of Europe, the Venice Commission and many other independent observers.

Just to stress, the analysis made by the leaders of various political groups in the European Parliament is completely shared by the European Commission. That should not come as a surprise since our actions over the last year and a half have been in line with that analysis.

Recent measures taken by the Polish authorities in relation to the judicial system and the judges greatly amplify the threat to the Rule of Law. That is why we had a discussion today in College on how to respond to this.

Let me recall the heart of the matter.

Under its Rule of Law Framework, the Commission has issued an Opinion and two Recommendations in relation to the Polish Constitutional Tribunal – in essence on the fact that the Constitutional Tribunal is no longer composed in accordance with the Polish Constitution and publication of its judgments is taken out of its hands.

Some judges lawfully elected are not appointed, some judges appointed are not lawfully elected. The legitimacy of the Tribunal is now seriously undermined.

In addition to that situation, four legislative measures reforming the judiciary as a whole have been presented recently to the Polish Parliament:

The first one, the law on the National School of Judiciary, has already entered into force;

The second, the law on the National Council for the Judiciary; the third, the law on the Ordinary Courts Organisation. These two have been adopted and await signing by the President;

And the law on the Supreme Court, which I understand has now been sent to a Committee in the Parliament for further review.

These laws considerably increase the systemic threat to the rule of law in Poland.

Each individual law, if adopted, would seriously erode the independence of the Polish judiciary.

Collectively, they would abolish any remaining judicial independence and put the judiciary under full political control of the government.

This is not the moment to go into a deep legal analysis, but under these reforms judges will serve at the pleasure of the political leaders and be dependent upon them from their appointment to their pension.

There are many reforms I can mention. Let me just mention but a few.

The 15 judges-members of the National Council for the Judiciary will be appointed by the Sejm whilst currently they are chosen by judges.

The mandate of all the current judges-members of the National Council for the Judiciary will be prematurely terminated.

The Minister of Justice will be granted the power to appoint and dismiss presidents of courts without being bound by concrete criteria, with no obligation to state reasons, and with no possibility for the judiciary to block these decisions.

I could mention many more but let me not do that right now.

These reforms raise concerns as to their compatibility with the Polish Constitution. However, an independent constitutional review is no longer possible given the current situation of the Constitutional Tribunal.

The laws also raise concerns of compatibility with Union law, since Polish courts like the courts of all Member States are called upon to provide an effective remedy in case of violations of EU law, in which case they act as the 'judges of the European Union'.

This matters potentially to anybody doing business in and with Poland, or even anybody visiting the country. I think every single citizen wants to have this, if they need a day in court, without having to think: "Hmm, is this judge going to get a call from the Minister telling him or her what to do." That is not how independent judiciary works.

On 13 July 2017, I wrote to both the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Polish Minister of Justice with my concerns about the new proposals.

I have asked the two Ministers to relaunch a dialogue and I have invited them to Brussels.

The letter explicitly underlined the importance of not adopting the new proposals.

Unfortunately, on 15 July 2017 two of the laws were approved by the Parliament.

The rule of law is one of the values on which our Union is founded and which defines our Union.

This is no matter only for the Polish people. What is happening in Poland affects the Union as a whole. All of us, every single Member State, every citizen of the Union.

The new laws are not all yet officially in place. So today we cannot take formal decisions just yet.

But we can send a clear and strong political message.

First of all, we will swiftly prepare a third recommendation under the Rule of Law Framework to be formally adopted by College next week;

Secondly, we will swiftly prepare infringement procedures for breach of EU law, also to be launched next week;

Finally, with regard to Article 7, the option of triggering Article 7 of the Treaty was part of the discussion and it should come as no surprise to anyone that, given the latest developments, we are coming very close to triggering Article 7.

Having said all of this, our hand is still extended to the Polish authorities

for dialogue. But dialogue must be aimed at redressing the situation. And dialogue, if it happens or not, will not stop the Commission from taking any measures it deems necessary in this framework.

Finally, you know, all of you have been following this. A lot of emotions around this. A lot of personal attacks. Putting people's personal credibility or integrity in the discussion. Mine or other people's. I can take it. They should take their best shot.

But what should not be happening is that journalists are intimidated to do their work, their job. What should not be happening is that anybody sitting in this room, who wants to ask critical questions of me, would feel a reservation, would feel fear for consequences if they do that.

That is not how it works in a free society. That is not how it works. So I would call upon everyone involved in this discussion, to stop it already with this intimidation of journalists if they feel that journalists are asking too critical questions. To stop it already that if a journalist asks a critical question, to brand them enemy of the people or something like that.

"In darkness democracy dies", I think is the motto of the Washington Post. For democracy we need the press to be able to work unimpeded, free. To be at times annoying, also to me. I have some experience. That is your job. My job is to take it and to answer your questions. This should be the attitude of everyone, involved in politics in the European Union. That is the European way, that is how the European Union can function, that is how our people can live in a free and fair and open society.

Thank you very much.