

# Erklärung der Hohen Vertreterin Federica Mogherini im Namen der Europäischen Union anlässlich des Welttags der Pressefreiheit am

Free press is vital for having a democracy that works. Today we celebrate the **World Press Freedom Day** in a difficult context for journalism. Freedom of expression and Freedom of the press are under increasing attacks around the world.

Free, diverse and independent media are indispensable to promoting and protecting democracy worldwide. A free press and freedom of expression are among the very same foundations of democracy, contribute to stable, inclusive, and resilient societies and can help defuse tensions and contain conflicts. The EU supports the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes ensuring universal access to information and protection of freedom of expression.

Supporting independent, quality and ethical journalism is essential. By facilitating the free flow of quality and well-researched information on matters of public interest, and by acting as the “public’s watchdog”, independent media are the basis of a participatory democracy and a tool to make governments accountable for their actions. The EU ensures that respect for freedom of expression is integrated in all EU policies and development programmes. The EU is notably funding specific projects in third countries enhancing quality of journalism, access to public information and freedom of expression. Since June 2015, the EU has supported at least 45 endangered Human Rights Defenders that promote the right of freedom of expression under its small grant scheme.

The EU condemns the increase of threats and violations against journalists and media professional offline and in cyberspace. All states are expected to fulfil their global obligations to protect freedom of expression and the safety of journalists by providing a supportive legal environment and prosecuting all attacks against journalists. The EU consistently opposes – in bilateral contacts with third countries as well as in multilateral and regional fora – any legislation, regulation or political pressure that limits freedom of expression and takes concrete steps to prevent and respond to attacks against journalists and bloggers.

The EU Guidelines on Freedom of expression online and offline, adopted in 2014, and their continued implementation, reaffirm the EU’s determination to promote freedom of opinion and of expression as rights to be exercised by everyone everywhere, based on the principles of equality, non-discrimination and universality, through any media and regardless of frontiers.

---

# إع ن الممثلة العليا ل اتحاد ا وروبي فيدريكا موغريني باسم ا اتحاد ا وروبي بمناسبة اليوم العالمي 2 لحرية الصحافة في 3 أيار/مايو

Free press is vital for having a democracy that works. Today we celebrate the **World Press Freedom Day** in a difficult context for journalism. Freedom of expression and Freedom of the press are under increasing attacks around the world.

Free, diverse and independent media are indispensable to promoting and protecting democracy worldwide. A free press and freedom of expression are among the very same foundations of democracy, contribute to stable, inclusive, and resilient societies and can help defuse tensions and contain conflicts. The EU supports the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes ensuring universal access to information and protection of freedom of expression.

Supporting independent, quality and ethical journalism is essential. By facilitating the free flow of quality and well-researched information on matters of public interest, and by acting as the “public’s watchdog”, independent media are the basis of a participatory democracy and a tool to make governments accountable for their actions. The EU ensures that respect for freedom of expression is integrated in all EU policies and development programmes. The EU is notably funding specific projects in third countries enhancing quality of journalism, access to public information and freedom of expression. Since June 2015, the EU has supported at least 45 endangered Human Rights Defenders that promote the right of freedom of expression under its small grant scheme.

The EU condemns the increase of threats and violations against journalists and media professional offline and in cyberspace. All states are expected to fulfil their global obligations to protect freedom of expression and the safety of journalists by providing a supportive legal environment and prosecuting all attacks against journalists. The EU consistently opposes – in bilateral contacts with third countries as well as in multilateral and regional fora – any legislation, regulation or political pressure that limits freedom of expression and takes concrete steps to prevent and respond to attacks against journalists and bloggers.

The EU Guidelines on Freedom of expression online and offline, adopted in 2014, and their continued implementation, reaffirm the EU’s determination to promote freedom of opinion and of expression as rights to be exercised by everyone everywhere, based on the principles of equality, non-discrimination

and universality, through any media and regardless of frontiers.

---

## Declarația Înaltului Reprezentant, Federica Mogherini, în numele Uniunii Europene, cu ocazia Zilei Mondiale a Libertății Presei

Free press is vital for having a democracy that works. Today we celebrate the **World Press Freedom Day** in a difficult context for journalism. Freedom of expression and Freedom of the press are under increasing attacks around the world.

Free, diverse and independent media are indispensable to promoting and protecting democracy worldwide. A free press and freedom of expression are among the very same foundations of democracy, contribute to stable, inclusive, and resilient societies and can help defuse tensions and contain conflicts. The EU supports the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes ensuring universal access to information and protection of freedom of expression.

Supporting independent, quality and ethical journalism is essential. By facilitating the free flow of quality and well-researched information on matters of public interest, and by acting as the “public’s watchdog”, independent media are the basis of a participatory democracy and a tool to make governments accountable for their actions. The EU ensures that respect for freedom of expression is integrated in all EU policies and development programmes. The EU is notably funding specific projects in third countries enhancing quality of journalism, access to public information and freedom of expression. Since June 2015, the EU has supported at least 45 endangered Human Rights Defenders that promote the right of freedom of expression under its small grant scheme.

The EU condemns the increase of threats and violations against journalists and media professional offline and in cyberspace. All states are expected to fulfil their global obligations to protect freedom of expression and the safety of journalists by providing a supportive legal environment and prosecuting all attacks against journalists. The EU consistently opposes – in bilateral contacts with third countries as well as in multilateral and regional fora – any legislation, regulation or political pressure that limits freedom of expression and takes concrete steps to prevent and respond to attacks against journalists and bloggers.

The EU Guidelines on Freedom of expression online and offline, adopted in 2014, and their continued implementation, reaffirm the EU’s determination to

promote freedom of opinion and of expression as rights to be exercised by everyone everywhere, based on the principles of equality, non-discrimination and universality, through any media and regardless of frontiers.

---

## Compliance and practical functioning of the EU Single Market

The Single Market is one of the EU's greatest achievements. It enables people, services, goods and capital to move freely. It has fuelled economic growth and made the everyday life of European businesses and consumers easier. A functioning Single Market stimulates competition and trade, improves efficiency, raises quality, and helps consumers benefit from more varied and better priced products and services.

Despite the overall success of the Single Market, its benefits do not always materialise because rules are not known or implemented, or they are undermined by other barriers. Today the European Commission continues to deliver on its [Single Market Strategy](#) – the Commission's roadmap to unlock the full potential of the Single Market.

The Commission has already put forward [proposals on e-commerce](#), [guidance on the collaborative economy](#), steps to [modernise the EU's standardisation policy](#), a [Start-up and Scale-up Initiative](#), and [measures to give a fresh boost to the services sector](#).

Today's package of measures will make it easier for people and companies to manage their paperwork online in their home country or when working, living or doing business in another EU country and it will help ensure that commonly agreed EU rules are respected.

### **1. Single Digital Gateway**

#### **Why do we need the Single Digital Gateway?**

The Commission wants to make it easier for citizens and companies who need to navigate regulatory and administrative requirements to access the necessary information and assistance online. Indeed, Europeans – whether at home or living in another EU country – are often confronted with online public service information that is of varying quality or incomplete. Moreover, procedures that are online in some EU countries are not always accessible to users from another EU country. As a result, people and businesses waste precious time and money both at home and abroad and public administrations face an unnecessary burden. This makes it harder for everyone to seize all the opportunities offered by the Single Market.

#### **What is the Single Digital Gateway and how will it help?**

The Single Digital Gateway will be a central, online and easily accessible entry point for people and companies looking for complete, accurate and up-to-date information, administrative procedures and assistance services linked to their Single Market rights. The gateway will not only provide citizens and businesses with information about applicable rules available on EU and national websites, but also direct them towards assistance services when further help is needed and allow them to follow national administrative procedures online. It will also support Member States in their efforts to adopt e-government strategies to offer a modern and efficient public service.

The Single Digital Gateway builds on the following main elements:

- Any procedure currently available online for domestic users will be accessible to users from other Member States.
- Member States will have to offer at least 13 key administrative procedures online in a safe, central and user-centric national platform. These include requests for a birth certificate, car registration, starting a business or registration for social security benefits:

<b>Life events</b>	<b>Procedures</b>
Birth	Requesting a <b>birth certificate</b>
Studying	Applying for a <b>study grant</b> from a public institution
Working	Registering for social security <b>benefits</b> Requesting <b>recognition of diploma</b> Registering a <b>change of address</b>
Moving	Requesting/ <b>renewing ID card</b> or passport Registering a motor vehicle
Retiring	Claiming <b>pension</b> and pre-retirement benefits from public or semi-public schemes General <b>registration of business activity</b> , excluding procedures concerning the constitution of companies or firms within the meaning of the second paragraph of Article 54 TFEU
Starting a business	<b>Registration of an employer</b> (a natural person) with public or semi-public pension and insurance schemes Registration of employees with public or semi-public <b>pension</b> and <b>insurance</b> employee Notification to the social security schemes of the <b>end of contract</b> with an employee
Doing business	Payment of <b>social contributions</b> for employees

- All information and procedures must be available in at least one further EU language in addition to the country's official languages.
- According to the "once-only" principle, important documents will only need to be submitted once and then available to be reused in other national procedures at the request of the user.

## **Does the Commission want to harmonise the way Member States handle their administrative procedures?**

No. The Single Digital Gateway deals with the “front office” of public administrations (i.e. the link between the administration and the user) by ensuring easier access to them, but it does not harmonise the actual procedures which remain a national competence.

## **Who will benefit from the Single Digital Gateway?**

All citizens will benefit from a modern, digital public service covering all main aspects of their life, and all companies will benefit from accessing concrete information on starting a business, employment rules, taxation rules, selling goods, providing services, product requirements, accessing finance and environmental rules. Additionally, the initiative will benefit those who want to travel, study, work, start a business, provide goods and services or retire in another EU country but who face additional hurdles when information and procedures are not available online.

## **What are the expected costs and benefits of such an initiative?**

The aggregated annual costs combined for the European Commission and all Member States should amount to around EUR 9 million. The Commission has already contributed EUR 8 million from the Horizon 2020 research and innovation funding programme towards the development of the required digital infrastructure needed for the “Once-Only” Principle Project (T00P), an initiative to demonstrate the “once-only” principle on a cross-border scale with the aim to reduce the administrative burden of businesses and public administrations. Additionally, the Commission will make available up to EUR 6 million to support translation costs.

For EU citizens, the Single Digital Gateway could mean saving up to 855 000 hours of time annually. For businesses, annual benefits are estimated to amount to at least EUR 11 billion.

## **When will the Single Digital Gateway be launched?**

With the support of the European Parliament and the Member States during the legislative negotiations, a fully-fledged single digital gateway could be a reality by 2020.

## **2. Single Market Information Tool (SMIT)**

### **Why does the Commission need a new information gathering tool?**

People and companies can only benefit from the Single Market if commonly agreed rules are fit for purpose and are correctly applied in all Member States. When the Commission is alerted to cases where the Single Market may not be working properly, evidence is needed to demonstrate if and where EU laws were applied incorrectly. Enabling the Commission to act faster and more effectively to ensure compliance will benefit all citizens and companies who will be able to exercise their Single Market rights in a better and quicker way.

To ensure this, timely access to comprehensive, reliable, and accurate market information is crucial.

Single Market difficulties can be found in many different areas. For example, in a [public consultation](#) citizens and consumer organisations reported price discrimination based on residency; restricted access to online audio-visual content while abroad; delivery of online purchases impossible to certain countries. In the majority of cases, the Commission is able to acquire the information necessary to resolve the problem from Member States or through public consultations, complaints and publicly available statistics. But sometimes the available information is not enough for the Commission to:

- confirm with certainty whether national legislation or practice is in breach of EU rules;
- assess with sufficient precision the impact on the Single Market;
- judge how efficient a Commission action (an infringement procedure against a Member State or a proposal for new EU legislation) would be in improving the current situation in the Single Market.

### **What is SMIT?**

The Single Market Information Tool (SMIT) will allow the Commission to obtain, in clearly framed cases, timely, comprehensive and reliable quantitative and qualitative information from selected market players in specific instances, and as a last resort, where there are indications of serious difficulties with the application of EU Single Market legislation.

The information will be handled subject to strict confidentiality requirements. Being an addressee of a SMIT information request does not imply any wrongdoing, and SMIT will not allow the Commission to pursue infringement cases against individual market players.

It does not impose a recurring reporting obligation, but allows to source clearly defined and readily available data in targeted cases where this is strictly necessary.

SMIT is not a new enforcement procedure, but rather a tool that can be used within the current infringement procedure under Article 258 TFEU and as a last resort.

SMIT will help support the cooperation between Member States and the Commission in ensuring the correct application of EU law. Enabling the Commission to act faster and more effectively to ensure compliance will ultimately benefit all citizens and companies. SMIT will also allow the Commission to gather facts on areas of EU law which may need to be revised, thus ensuring that all proposals are evidence-based and results-oriented, in line with the better regulation principles.

### **In which areas would SMIT apply?**

SMIT is designed to apply to the Single Market in its broad sense: a functional area without internal frontiers where goods, people, services and capital circulate freely. It includes a wide range of EU legislation

including financial services, telecommunications, industry, transport, environment, energy, agriculture and fisheries sectors (other than the conservation of marine biological resources).

### **Is SMIT a tool to detect and pursue breaches of EU law by companies?**

SMIT is not a tool to investigate and punish a conduct of a company. SMIT will assist in detecting a potential problem which may deprive consumers and businesses of the benefits of the Single Market. SMIT is an information tool to be used in the context of existing enforcement mechanisms, notably infringement proceedings against Member States. It can also be a contribution when drawing up new regulation.

### **In what kind of scenarios could SMIT be used?**

SMIT is a generic tool that could help resolve any specific Single Market problem.

By way of example, data such as cost structure, pricing policy or product volumes sold could prove valuable to collect information on suspected geoblocking practices, to corroborate information on public tenders, or to obtain data on the pricing and underlying costs of cross-border parcel delivery.

As an illustration of its use, let's look at the utilities sector. If water, energy or transport services are subject to enough market pressure in a Member State, entities and contracting authorities operating in that sector can be exempted from the application of one of the public procurement directives, the Utilities Directive (Article 34 of the Directive 2014/25/EU). Such an exemption significantly reduces the administrative burden and allows companies to procure at their own discretion. Companies in those sectors thus have a clear incentive to be exempted from the application of this Directive. Analysing whether the degree of market pressure is sufficient to justify an exemption requires micro-level information that is not publicly available, including business secrets (such as data on prices, quantities and cost structure). Currently, the Commission can neither obtain such information from stakeholders other than the applicant, nor question the validity of the evidence presented by the applicant. The latter is particularly relevant because the Commission is at a clear disadvantage regarding the information about a sector compared to the applicant. Since the applicant has a clear incentive to be exempted, it could present the information in the most favourable light possible. This being a Single Market piece of legislation, the Commission is unable to use its information gathering powers available under EU competition law. Given the relevance of utilities for EU citizens' everyday life, a precise and timely assessment is essential.

### **How would the Commission determine when the use of SMIT is appropriate?**

The Commission would not use SMIT routinely, but only as a last resort, and always following a case-by-case assessment. The use of SMIT would be limited based on the following criteria:



- There must be a serious difficulty with the application of EU law;
- The information is not publically available;
- The information has not been provided by a Member State or by a natural or legal person upon request by the Commission.

#### **How would it work in practice?**

- **Commission decision** – If the above conditions are met, the Commission will first adopt a formal Decision, stating its intention to launch a SMIT procedure and would notify it to the Member States concerned without delay.
- **Information requests** – Requests will be addressed only to players that could be expected to provide relevant information and from whom the information should be readily available (e.g. acquiring such information does not require extended research). Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) could also be concerned, while micro-enterprises would be exempted.
- **Compliance** – The Commission would be empowered to impose monetary sanctions in case a market player provides incomplete or misleading information, or if a reply was not provided to a formal information request. The Commission would not impose such sanctions automatically, but would undertake a case-by-case assessment, with due regard to proportionality and appropriateness and in respect of discretion requirements. To impose a sanction, the Commission would need to adopt another formal Decision.

The Commission will ensure that the information submitted by companies is treated confidentially, following best practices from the competition policy field and protecting their business secrets. Furthermore, the Commission will be allowed to use the information collected only for the purpose for which it was requested.

#### **Will small companies be able to cope with the burden of such information requests?**

Small businesses face the greatest barriers when trying to start up and scale up across the Single Market, so their data could prove valuable in informing the Commission about practical difficulties they face. However, the Commission is mindful of the need to avoid overburdening small companies with requests for information.

Although SMEs are in the scope of the proposal, in respect of the principle of proportionality, the Commission will limit information requests to the strict minimum and avoiding significant additional costs of data gathering. Micro enterprises (defined as companies with less than 10 employees and with a turnover of less than EUR 2 million) are exempted from this proposal in order to avoid imposing disproportionate administrative burden on them.

#### **Does SMIT introduce new powers for the Commission?**

This proposal does not create any new powers for the Commission. It implements existing powers conferred by Treaty (Art. 337 TFEU) which allow

collecting information necessary to the Commission, being guardian of the Treaty. Already today the Commission is able to collect some sensitive company data to enforce single market rules in the area of competition. Such information is for instance collected from companies to examine antitrust and mergers cases or from Member States for the purposes of the state aid control. SMIT will not be used to investigate individuals' or companies' conduct but to ensure correct application of EU law in all Member States.

### **Will the information be made public?**

No, information will not be made public but on the contrary be handled subject to strict confidentiality rules.

Moreover, recipients of SMIT requests will have the opportunity to indicate the information they consider to be covered by the obligation of professional secrecy. Accordingly, any undertaking will have the possibility to submit confidential and non-confidential versions of the reply.

In the context of a formal infringement procedure, the Commission could transfer in full the replies received to the Member State concerned unless the responding firm marks business secrets/sensitive information.

### **When will the SMIT Regulation start to apply?**

Once adopted by the European Parliament and the Council, the Regulation will be published in the Official Journal of the European Union and become directly applicable 20 days later.

## **3. SOLVIT**

### **What is SOLVIT and what has it delivered?**

[SOLVIT](#) provides rapid and pragmatic solutions to citizens and businesses when they are experiencing difficulties while moving or doing business cross-border in the EU. It is a free of charge service provided collaboratively since 2002 by the national administrations in each EU country and in Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway. It is a faster, informal alternative to filing a court case, submitting a formal complaint to the Commission or putting forward a petition. It is an efficient tool to address the issues of companies, allowing cross-border business in Europe to grow in a secure environment.

SOLVIT deals with all cross-border issues related to the application of EU law in the area of the four freedoms of movement (persons, goods, services and capital), including policies closely linked to them (such as taxation, employment, social policy and transport). In 15 years, SOLVIT's case load has increased by a factor of 40. In total, the network has dealt with more than 17,000 cases of which nearly 90% were solved.

Real life [examples](#) include:

- **Residence rights** – SOLVIT helped a French trainee pilot to register as a resident in Belgium;

- **Recognition of professional qualifications** – the network helped three Portuguese nurses get their qualification recognised in Spain;
- **Taxation** – a French company asked SOLVIT to help get a VAT refund from Germany and received the amount requested after the network intervened.
- **Freedom to provide services** – thanks to SOLVIT intervention, a Swedish company (True Heading AB) was able to get hydrographical data for navigation from the competent Polish authority that had previously refused to provide them with.
- **Free movement of goods** – an Austrian producer of paints was having difficulties selling his products in Poland. The problem was resolved thanks to SOLVIT intervention.

More success stories

here: [http://ec.europa.eu/solvit/problems-solved/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/solvit/problems-solved/index_en.htm)

### How will it be improved?

The Commission is presenting an Action Plan to help even more people and businesses benefit from the services of SOLVIT by:

1. offering capacity building (e.g. increased legal trainings and knowledge sharing) to improve further its accessibility and its quality;
2. making it easier to find SOLVIT, especially through the web portal [Your Europe](#) and the single digital gateway in the future;
3. improving data collection so that evidence from SOLVIT cases can be used to improve the working of the Single Market.

The joint efforts by Member States and the Commission will reinforce SOLVIT in its unique role of ensuring that national authorities comply with EU law, whilst helping to resolve problems encountered by businesses and citizens in practice.

### 4. Next steps

Today's proposals for a regulation on the single digital gateway and for a regulation on the Single Market Information Tool will now be sent to the European Parliament and Council for adoption. The Solvit Action Plan will be presented to the European Parliament and Council. The implementation of the Solvit Action Plan is a joint responsibility of the Commission and the Member States.

See also [IP/17/1086](#)

---

## [Daily News 02 / 05 / 2017](#)

**Marché unique: la Commission agit pour faciliter son fonctionnement pratique et améliorer le respect des règles**

La Commission européenne présente aujourd'hui des mesures pour permettre aux particuliers et aux entreprises de régler plus facilement leurs formalités administratives en ligne, que ce soit dans leur propre pays ou lorsqu'ils travaillent, vivent ou font des affaires dans un autre pays de l'Union européenne. Les propositions visent également à assurer un meilleur respect des règles européennes. Jyrki **Katainen**, le vice-président en charge de l'emploi, de la croissance, de l'investissement et de la compétitivité, a déclaré: *"Les règles de l'UE protègent 500 millions de personnes au sein du marché unique et leur offrent la possibilité de vivre, de travailler et de faire des affaires dans n'importe quel pays de l'Union. Tout cela n'est possible que si les règles sont respectées. Les propositions présentées aujourd'hui contribueront à développer une culture du respect des règles. Elles permettront également aux particuliers et aux entreprises d'avoir pleinement accès aux procédures et à l'information en ligne, à la fois dans leur pays d'origine et à l'étranger."* Elżbieta **Bieńkowska**, commissaire pour le marché intérieur, l'industrie, l'entrepreneuriat et les PME, a ajouté: *"Aujourd'hui, nous mettons à disposition des outils concrets pour le marché unique. Le portail numérique unique constitue aussi une incitation forte pour moderniser les administrations publiques par la mise en place d'ambitieuses stratégies d'administration électronique axées sur l'utilisateur. Par ailleurs, le nouvel outil d'information sur le marché unique SMIT contribuera à renforcer l'action de la Commission en matière de contrôle de l'application de la législation, de manière à ce que les droits des citoyens liés au marché unique soient dûment respectés et que les entreprises européennes se heurtent à moins d'obstacles lors de l'extension de leurs activités et de l'entrée sur de nouveaux marchés."* Le train de mesures est composé de trois initiatives concrètes adoptées aujourd'hui par la Commission: le portail numérique unique, l'outil d'information sur le marché unique (SMIT) et le plan d'action SOLVIT. Un [communiqué de presse](#), un [MEMO](#) et une [fiche d'information](#) sont disponibles. (Pour plus d'informations: Lucia Caudet – Tel.: + 32 229 56182; Maud Noyon – Tel.: +32 229 80379; Mirna Talko – Tel.: +32 229 87278)

## **European Youth Week 2017 encourages young people to contribute to the debate on the future of the EU and of EU youth action**

The eighth edition of [European Youth Week](#) is currently taking place with a broad range of events from 1 to 7 May and activities organised in all 33 countries participating in the EU's [Erasmus+](#) programme. With the slogan "Shape it, move it, be it", it encourages young people to get involved in the discussions on the future of EU youth policy, to move abroad with Erasmus+, and to be part of the newly launched [European Solidarity Corps](#) which gives opportunities to young people to express their solidarity with those in need. Already more than 28,000 young people have signed up to the European Solidarity Corps and first participants already started their placements. A proposal for a dedicated legal base to consolidate and further shape this new initiative is [scheduled for adoption on 24 May](#). Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Tibor **Navracsics**, will take part in the official launch event of the European Youth Week, a two-day [European Conference on future EU Youth Strategy](#), in Brussels tomorrow. Already today, he will have a

meeting with a number of young people and representatives of youth organisations to prepare these discussions. Commissioner **Navracsics** said: *“With our current cooperation with Member States on youth policy drawing to a close in 2018, we need to reflect on the future. We want to hear the views of everyone involved in EU youth affairs to make sure that cooperation in youth action delivers, enabling young people to find their place in society and build the Europe of the future. I look forward to exchanging ideas on our future youth strategy during Youth Week and for the rest of the year.”* During the week the spotlight will be on the inspiring stories of change-makers and their projects under Erasmus+ that encourage more young people to take part. (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 2 296 70 83; Inga Höglund – Tel.: +32 229 50698)

### **Discover an EU-funded project near you: the 2017 “Europe in my Region” campaign kicks off**

Visit an aquaculture research centre in Ílhavo, Portugal, a language school equipped with the latest IT equipment in Split, Croatia, or take a guided tour in Vienna to spot and visit EU-funded projects in the city. The “EU in my Region” campaign starts today and throughout May, hundreds of EU-funded projects open their doors to the public; find one near you on this [interactive map](#). Photo and blogging competitions are also organised so that citizens can share their experience. Commissioner for Regional policy Corina **Crețu** said: *“Open your eyes and you will see that the EU’s Cohesion Policy is everywhere around you, working for a better quality of life in your region and city. There are so many success stories out there and everyone needs to tell them. Not just us, in the EU institutions, but also Member States, local authorities and people, those who found a job, who got a training opportunity or access to broadband thanks to Cohesion Policy. Let’s do this together.”* Find more details on the campaign [here](#). (For more information: Anna-Kaisa Itkonen – Tel.: +32 229 56186; Sophie Dupin de Saint-Cyr – Tel.: +32 229 56169)

### **Parliament approves budget implementation in 2015**

On 27 April, the Parliament gave the final approval, known as ‘discharge’, to the way in which the European Commission implemented the EU budget in 2015. The discharge is an EU mechanism for transparency and accountability. It is granted by the European Parliament on a recommendation from the Member States in the Council. This annual procedure enables the Council and the European Parliament to keep the management of the taxpayers’ money under democratic control. Apart from approving the Commission’s accounts and its handling of the EU budget, the vote also signals the European Parliament’s strong support for the drive to further increase the effectiveness of EU budgetary spending, through the Commission’s [‘EU Budget focused on Results’](#) initiative. The Commission is responsible for implementing the EU budget in cooperation with Member States in line with the principles of sound financial management. (For more information: Alexander Winterstein – Tel.: +32 229 93265; Nicole

*Bockstaller – Tel.: +32 229 52589)*

### **State aid: Commission approves the sale of three Italian bridge banks to UBI Banca**

The European Commission has approved under EU state aid rules the sale of three Italian bridge banks Nuova Banca Marche, Nuova Banca Etruria and Nuova Carichieti to Unione di Banche Italiane (UBI Banca). The Commission has assessed the integration plan by UBI Banca, which would turn around the three loss-making bridge banks by fully integrating them into UBI Banca and thus enabling their return to viability. This will also avoid undue distortions of competition. The three bridge banks were created in [November 2015](#) when the Bank of Italy decided to put Banca delle Marche, Banca Popolare dell'Etruria e del Lazio and Cassa di Risparmio della Provincia di Chieti into resolution. The Commission concluded that the process for the sale of the three bridge banks, conducted by the Italian authorities, was open and competitive and selected the best available bid. The purchase by UBI Banca of the three bridge banks depended on their remaining non-performing loans being sold to a third party. In that context, the resolution fund injected additional capital of €810 million into the three bridge banks and granted a set of guarantees for risks related to the acquired entities. The Commission concluded that the measures were in line with EU state aid rules. The Commission's approval was based on the [Commission's 2013 Banking Communication](#) that have been in place unchanged since August 2013. More information will be available in the [state aid register](#) on the [Competition](#) website under the case numbers [SA.39543](#) (Banca delle Marche), [SA.41134](#) (Banca Popolare dell'Etruria e del Lazio) and [SA.43547](#) (Cassa di risparmio della Provincia di Chieti). *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Yizhou Ren – Tel.: +32 229 94889)*

### **Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of M.K.M. Building Supplies by Bain Capital Investors**

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of M.K.M. Building Supplies of the UK, by Bain Capital Investors of the US. M.K.M. Building Supplies is a building materials merchant, with 47 branches across England and Scotland. Bain Capital Investors is a private equity firm. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would not raise competition concerns because the companies are not active in the same markets and market shares in all vertically linked markets remain limited. 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.8432](#). *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)*

### **Eurostat: Mars 2017 – Le taux de chômage à 9,5% dans la zone euro – À 8,0% dans l'UE28**

Dans la zone euro (ZE19), le taux de chômage corrigé des variations saisonnières s'est établi à 9,5% en mars 2017, stable comparé à février 2017



et en baisse par rapport au taux de 10,2% enregistré en mars 2016. Il s'agit du taux le plus faible enregistré dans la zone euro depuis avril 2009. Dans l'UE28, le taux de chômage s'est établi à 8,0% en mars 2017, en baisse par rapport au taux de 8,1% de février 2017 et à celui de 8,7% de mars 2016. Cela demeure le taux le plus faible enregistré dans l'UE28 depuis janvier 2009. Ces chiffres sont publiés par Eurostat, l'office statistique de l'Union européenne. Un communiqué de presse est disponible [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Christian Wigand– Tel.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: +32 229 67094)

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **EU-Jordan: Brussels' high-level meeting for strengthening trade, business and investment opportunities in Jordan**

Tomorrow, the European Union and [Jordan](#) will hold a high-level meeting in Brussels to further strengthen the bilateral trade and investment opportunities. The event will bring together high profile actors from the EU and Jordan. It will be an opportunity to raise awareness of the business opportunities available to Jordanian companies under the new more flexible rules of origin for access to the European market agreed in 2016. In July last year, the EU decided to simplify the rules concerning the use of foreign components to allow more Jordanian products benefit from import duty discount upon imports into the EU. Products that can benefit from better access to the EU market include textiles, engineering and electrical appliances, chemical and plastic products, as well as furniture and other wooden products. The initiative aims to support Jordan's economy in midst of the Syrian refugee crisis and to complement Jordan's own efforts to increase economic activity and create sustainable jobs for both Jordanians and Syrian refugees. The meeting is part of a longer-term EU engagement to support private sector development and investment in Jordan. The entire event will [be live streamed](#). Commissioners Cecilia **Malmström** and Johannes **Hahn** will represent the Commission and, together with Mr Yarub Qudah, Jordan Minister of Industry, Trade and Supply, will hold a press point at 16:00 at the VIP corner of the Berlaymont building. A dedicated [press release](#) and an updated [factsheet](#) on EU support to Jordan will be available online tomorrow. (For more information: Maja Kocijancic – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Daniel Rosario – Tel.: + 32 229 56185; Alceo Smerilli – Tel.: + 32 229 64887; Kinga Malinowska – Tel.: +32 229 51383)

### **Commission discusses with stakeholders financing investments in a sustainable blue economy**

Key stakeholders in sustainable business and investment are coming together in Brussels to discuss investment needs in the blue economy and what financing can do to ensure the sustainability of such investments. The meeting is taking place at the initiative of the European Commission, the [World Wide Fund for Nature](#) (WWF) and the [Prince of Wales' Charities International Sustainability Unit](#) (ISU) with the joint ambition of safeguarding the health of our ocean, whilst understanding what approaches

are needed for the ocean to sustainably support livelihoods, food security and jobs well into the future. According to projections from the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](#) (OECD), by 2030 the output of the ocean economy, roughly €1.3 trillion globally, could more than double. Karmenu **Vella**, Commissioner for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, commented: *“I firmly believe that future investments in the blue economy – whether by public or private institutions – should ensure environmentally and socially sustainable outcomes and a science-based management of ocean and coastal resources. The active involvement of financial institutions in contributing towards healthy and productive ocean will be indispensable.”* In the coming decade, sectors such as marine energy, aquaculture, tourism and transport could offer significant investment opportunities but we need to determine how economic development in the ocean is undertaken whilst ensuring that the health of the ocean’s assets are sustained and improved. The discussion is part of the Commission’s wider efforts to engage with the private sector and NGOs with a view to generating commitments on sustainable ocean use for the [‘Our Ocean 2017’](#) conference, hosted in Malta by HRVP **Mogherini** and Commissioner **Vella**, from 5 to 6 October 2017. (For more information: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: +32 229 56172; Iris Petsa – Tel.: + 32 229 93321)

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