European partners strengthen private sector financing in East Africa

- **Nairobi to host two-day forum to increase the impact of banking and microfinance**
- **Local banks to share experience gained from EUR 1 billion EIB business investment**
- **Private sector access to finance confirmed as key focus of European Union in Africa**

Nairobi will this week host the EIB Eastern Africa SME and Microfinance Banking Forum. The event, being held for the second time in the Kenyan capital, seeks to improve the economic and social impact of private sector financing supported by the lending arm of the European Union in East Africa.

“Ensuring access to finance and increasing the impact of business investment is key for Kenya’s future. The European Investment Bank has proven technical and financial experience supporting successful private sector businesses in Africa. The EIB Eastern Africa SME and Microfinance Banking Forum is a unique opportunity for Kenyan finance and microfinance professionals and business leaders to share best-practice and contribute to economic and social development across East Africa. This week’s meeting builds on the strong track record of close cooperation between the EIB, the European Union and the Kenyan finance and business community; providing financing to help business growth and improve skills that expand the impact of responsible banking.” said Sheila M’Mbijjewe, Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Kenya.

“Enabling a thriving private sector is essential to create jobs, unlock economic opportunities and improve social development. In recent years cooperation between African and European partners here in East Africa has enabled the European Investment Bank, the EU Bank, and EU supported technical assistance to strengthen the impact of tailor-made lending programmes. The two days of discussions this week will share lessons learnt from successful financing for businesses across the region and banking best practice.” said Ambassador Simon Mordue, Head of the European Union Delegation in Nairobi.

Sharing experience from EUR 1 billion private sector support in East Africa

Over the last decade the European Investment Bank has provided more than EUR 1 billion in East Africa for private sector investment across East Africa.

“Thousands of companies across East Africa have benefited from the close cooperation between African and European partners and the skills of more than 9,000 business finance professionals strengthened through dedicated training programmes. The European Investment Bank looks forward to intense discussions in Nairobi this week with microfinance and banking partners from four countries in the region to ensure even stronger impact of future private sector investment in the years ahead.” said Catherine Collin, Head of the European Investment Bank Regional Representation in East Africa.

The two-day EIB Eastern Africa SME and Microfinance Banking Forum, hosted by the European Investment Bank in partnership with the Trade and Development Bank and AFC Consultants, will enable international finance experts to share experience and best practice with leading regional banks and microfinance institutions.

Increasing access to finance by refugees and supporting vulnerable smallholders

During the EIB Eastern Africa SME and Microfinance Banking Forum regional banking experts will learn from recent innovative financing partnerships and discuss how successful schemes could be replicated.

This will include examining how refugee communities across Uganda are benefiting from banking services for the first time following a successful training to ensure increased access to finance refugee communities, organised in cooperation with Centenary Bank and UNHCR.

Experience gained from the EIB’s first dedicated support for long-term agriculture investment in Kenya, working with Equity Bank across the country will also be shared. The scheme launched earlier this year is helping agriculture companies to modernise and harness the full economic, employment and export potential of agriculture. The programme is enabling local currency financing for farmers and access to seven year loans.

Sharing local understanding and international best banking practice

This week’s event will bring together more than 110 regional banking, microfinance and business leaders, international finance experts and foreign Ambassadors to share experience and best practice. Local businesses will also get direct feedback to improve business plans and enhance their growth strategies.

The EIB supported 60 projects across Africa in 2018 with €3.3 billion in investment. €1.6 billion went to private companies in sectors such as telecommunication, energy and agriculture.

Brexit: European Commission recommends the European Council (Article 50) to endorse the agreement reached on the revised Protocol on Ireland / Northern

Ireland and revised Political Declaration

The European Commission has today recommended the European Council (Article 50) to endorse the agreement reached at negotiator level on the Withdrawal Agreement, including a revised Protocol on Ireland / Northern Ireland, and approve a revised Political Declaration on the framework of the future EU-UK relationship. The Commission also recommends that the European Parliament give its consent to this agreement. This follows a series of intensive negotiations between the European Commission and UK negotiators over the past few days.

Jean-Claude **Juncker**, President of the European Commission, said: *"This agreement is a fair compromise between the EU and the UK. It is testament to the commitment and willingness of both sides to do what is best for EU and UK citizens. We now have a newly agreed Protocol that protects peace and stability on the island of Ireland and fully protects our Single Market. I hope that we can now bring this over the line and provide the certainty our citizens and businesses so deserve."*

Michel **Barnier**, the European Commission's Chief Negotiator, said: *"We had difficult discussions over the past days. We have managed to find solutions that fully respect the integrity of the Single Market. We created a new and legally operative solution to avoid a hard border, and protect peace and stability on the island of Ireland. It is a solution that works for the EU, for the UK and for people and businesses in Northern Ireland."*

The revised Protocol provides a legally operational solution that avoids a hard border on the island of Ireland, protects the all-island economy and the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement in all its dimensions and safeguards the integrity of the Single Market. This solution responds to the unique circumstances on the island of Ireland with the aim of protecting peace and stability.

All other elements of the Withdrawal Agreement remain unchanged in substance, as per the agreement reached on 14 November 2018. The Withdrawal Agreement brings legal certainty where the UK's withdrawal from the EU created uncertainty: citizens' rights, the financial settlement, a transition period at least until the end of 2020, governance, Protocols on Gibraltar and Cyprus, as well as a range of other separation issues.

The revised Withdrawal Agreement

In terms of regulations, Northern Ireland will remain aligned to a limited set of rules related to the EU's Single Market in order to avoid a hard border: legislation on goods, sanitary rules for veterinary controls ("SPS rules"), rules on agricultural production/marketing, VAT and excise in respect of goods, and state aid rules.

In terms of customs, the EU-UK Single Customs Territory, as agreed in November 2018, has been removed from the Protocol on Ireland / Northern Ireland, at the request of the current UK government. EU and UK negotiators have now found a new way to achieve the goal of avoiding a customs border on the island of Ireland, while at the same time ensuring Northern Ireland remains part of the UK's customs territory. This agreement fully protects the integrity of the EU's Single Market and Customs Union, and avoids any regulatory and customs checks at the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Finally, the EU and the UK have agreed to create a new mechanism on 'consent', which will give the Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly a decisive voice on the long-term application of relevant EU law in Northern Ireland. The Commission has been in close contact with the Irish government on this point.

The revised Political Declaration

The main change in the Political Declaration relates to the future EU-UK economic relationship where the current UK government has opted for a model based on a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). The Political Declaration provides for an ambitious FTA with zero tariffs and quotas between the EU and the UK. It states that robust commitments on a level playing field should ensure open and fair competition. The precise nature of commitments will be commensurate with the ambition of the future relationship and take into account the economic connectedness and geographic proximity of the UK.

Next steps

It is for the European Council (Article 50) to endorse the revised Withdrawal Agreement in its entirety, as well as approve the revised Political Declaration on the framework of the future relationship.

Before the Withdrawal Agreement can enter into force, it needs to be ratified by the EU and the UK. For the EU, the Council of the European Union must authorise the signature of the Withdrawal Agreement, before sending it to the European Parliament for its consent. The United Kingdom must ratify the agreement according to its own constitutional arrangements.

For more information

Letter from President Jean-Claude Juncker to President Donald Tusk

Revised Protocol on Ireland / Northern Ireland

Revised Political Declaration

European Commission Recommendation

Questions & Answers

More information is available on our website

European Cooperation: improved e-filing in Bulgaria

October 17, 2019 *European Trade Mark and Design Network*

European Cooperation: improved e-filing in Bulgaria

The Patent Office of the Republic of Bulgaria (BPO) has successfully implemented a set of improvements to their e-filing system.

Design e-filing is now integrated with the Harmonised Database of Product Indications (DesignClass). The BPO is the second EU national and regional IP office to implement DesignClass in its e-filing system.

Further enhancements include a new interface for selecting goods and services in trade mark e-filing, as well as other usability improvements.

The latest improvements, accessible via the BPO portal, were incorporated along with the technology upgrade and new e-services that were launched in September 2018.

As a pilot office, the BPO will continue to implement more improvements to their front-office system within the framework of the European Cooperation projects, in particular the ‘ECP2 Major Improvements to the Front Office’ project.
In total, the EUIPO and its stakeholders are collaborating on five major European Cooperation Projects, with the aim of benefiting users across the EU by providing modern, state-of-the-art tools and services for EU IP offices.

Working group on euro risk-free rates issues recommendations to address impact of euro risk-free rates transition on risk management

PRESS RELEASE

17 October 2019

- Report highlights types of risk financial institutions face and issues recommendations in four key areas
- Main focus on overall implications for interest rate risk management
- Careful preparation should minimise disruption to markets and consumers

The private sector working group on euro risk-free rates has published a report containing recommendations, from a risk management perspective, on the transition to new risk-free rates. The analysis conducted in the report consists of: (i) general risk management considerations; (ii) risk management implications of transitioning from EONIA to the euro short-term rate (€STR); (iii) risk management implications of €STR-based fallback rates for EURIBOR; and (iv) additional risk management considerations for the asset management and insurance sectors.

To ensure its recommendations are adopted by all market participants, the working group has created a financial accounting and risk management sub-group comprised of representatives from European and international credit institutions, consulting and accounting firms, clearing houses, and investment management firms and associations. The European Central Bank (ECB), European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA), European Commission and Financial Services and Markets Authority (FSMA) all act as observers in the sub-group.

The report does not focus on the effects of the transition on specific financial instruments but on the overall implications for managing interest rate risk, particularly during the implementation phase of the transition period.

The full report sets out the detailed recommendations and underlying analyses. The working group’s recommendations are not legally binding. They nevertheless provide guidance for market participants preparing for the transition to risk-free rates.

For media queries, please contact William Lelieveldt, tel.: +49 69 1344 7316.

Notes

The working group on euro risk-free rates, for which the ECB provides the secretariat, is an industry-led group established in 2018 by the ECB, FSMA, ESMA and the European Commission. Its main tasks are to identify and recommend alternative risk-free rates and transition paths.

Media contacts

Speech by President Juncker at the inauguration ceremony of the European Labour Authority

Prime Minister, dear Peter,

Valdis,

Marianne,

Maroš,

Nicolas, the newcomer, gutt dat’s de do bass,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Excellencies – because there are some,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

I am happy to see you tonight to inaugurate the European Labour Authority. As our British friends would say, this Authority is the ‘jewel in the crown’ of a lot of the work we have been doing together for a social Europe in recent years.

When I was elected President of the Commission five years ago, the European Union was in a dire situation. It was struggling to overcome its worst economic and social crisis since World War II. And it was seen by too many of our citizens as a source of problems, rather than solutions. This has changed to a large extent.

Five years later, now, I believe that Europe is in much better shape.

14 million jobs have been created. Unemployment is at an historical low, lower than in 2000. The results do not come out of nowhere. For five years, we have fought hard to put Europe back on track and sustain its economic recovery.

From the Investment Plan for Europe – which was initially called Juncker Plan, but now that it works, it is called the European Fund for Strategic Investments – to the use of flexibility under the Stability and Growth Pact, from the fight – big fight – to keep Greece in the euro, to the relaunch of the Youth Guarantee, we worked hard to deliver where it mattered for European citizens.

What we have done, we have done with a purpose: That of putting people first. Since I was a young Minister of Employment – a few years ago, at the age of 28, I am 64 now, envisaging 65 – I have been campaigning for a more social Europe and have been pushing for a humane approach to European politics.

I did not stop that when I became President of the Commission. And I am proud to see that this ambition is reflected in the European Pillar of Social Rights, which we managed to proclaim in November 2017 in Gothenburg, with the support of the European Parliament and the Council, in the presence of European leaders and of many of you here.

The Pillar is a major step forward. It contains rights and principles which are essential for the world of work in the 21st century: From fair wages to health care; from lifelong learning to a better work-life balance; from equality between women and men to the right to a minimum income.

Already today, thanks to the hard work of Valdis and Marianne, 24 legal initiatives were adopted under this mandate to give life to the Pillar. And I am very pleased to see that the Pillar will be at the core of the priorities of the future Commission, as well as in the safe hands of Valdis and in the experienced hands of my good friend Nicolas.

In all these years, one particular challenge has been to fight for modern, fair and efficient rules for the free movement of workers. I am experienced enough not to be naïve, but it happens from time to time. This freedom – the one of the movement of workers – has been under attack. Weak attacks, sometimes. Strong attacks, more times.

Freedom of movement was attacked for the wrong reasons, with many nationalistic and hateful arguments by people who wanted to discriminate between workers and create in fact two classes of European citizens. We cannot and that we will never accept that.

But freedom of movement was also under question for more legitimate reasons, because it was not seen as fair and because there were risks associated to a lack of rules, to fraud or to abuse. This we needed to fix urgently. If we had gone back on free movement of people, we would have lost one of our most cherished freedoms, and we would have put at risk the rest of our Single Market. We needed to act to reconcile workers with the European Union and to rebuild trust across Europe.

This is why, already in my Political Guidelines at the start of our mandate, I announced that we would change the rules on the posting of workers, to enforce a very simple principle: the same pay for the same work at the same place. This was not easy, but thanks to the efforts of everyone, common sense for once prevailed. And I am particularly proud that we were able to build a broad majority around these new rules. And I am grateful to Jeroen Lenaers, the Rapporteur of the Parliament, for having driven this process. Gut gemacht, Jeroen!

In the same spirit, we initiated a modernisation of the rules for the coordination of social security systems in order to facilitate cooperation between Member States, yet again with a simple principle in mind: equality of treatment between Europeans and between workers.

And I trust that the provisional agreement reached between Parliament and Council will soon be confirmed – this will be a good thing and Nicolas Schmit will do it.

Fair rules were needed, but they are not sufficient. Fair rules were needed, but they are not sufficient. Fair rules need to be enforced to be effective. This is why I proposed a European Labour Authority in September 2017. I pointed out at the time that it was absurd to have a banking authority to enforce European banking standards, but still no common labour authority to ensure fairness in the Single Market.

The new Authority was established in record time – it took less than a year – and I want to pay a special tribute to Marianne, to the different Council Presidencies and to the Parliament – I was mentioning Jeroen a minute ago.

I am also very happy, dear Peter, that Member States decided to locate the Authority in Bratislava. This is a very wise, symbolic and important choice. And I do believe that Members of the European Parliament – they are here – will do their best in order to make this possible.

The Authority will be a great asset on our quest for a more integrated and fairer European labour market. It will be here to support the work of the national labour authorities – and I salute all the members of the Management

Board present tonight – to ensure the effective implementation of European rules based on trust and close cooperation. Everyone can understand the approach and everyone will benefit: Better information for citizens and businesses about their rights and about their obligations, and a better guarantee that those who play by the rules are not undercut by others; better cooperation and simplification of the work across national administrations; and the possibility of mediation and hands-on support in case of cross-border issues.

This is not a theoretical thing, this Labour Authority; it has to deliver on practical problems that workers, companies, mainly small and medium-sized companies, are facing.

This is a particularly great step forward for the 17 million Europeans who live or work in another EU Member State than that of their nationality, as well as – it is sometimes forgotten – for the thousands of businesses that operate on a daily basis across our internal market.

So I would like to conclude by thanking you all, mainly those who were very much reluctant when we were still at the start of this process, some of them are here. They have been reached by maturity and common sense, because they finally agreed. But I am grateful for all those who were supporting this endeavour and I would like to wish you all the best for the work ahead.

To borrow the famous sentence of Jean Monnet: ‘Nothing is possible without men, but nothing lasts without institutions.’ This is true. I have to say that now, the men and women of my generation, of your generation for some of you, have created this institution and we very much count on you – mainly those men and those women of the future – to make it a success.

Bon vol à l’Autorité européenne du travail !