

## Remarks by President Donald Tusk after his meeting with Prime Minister of North Macedonia Zoran Zaev

Good morning. First of all, thank you very much Prime Minister, dear Zoran, for receiving me in Skopje today. It is great to be back again.

Your country's efforts over the past years have been remarkable. Together we have withstood one of the biggest migration crises that Europe has faced since the Second World War. It was for all of us a very difficult and demanding test of responsibility and effectiveness of action. Your country passed this test better than many EU Member States. You have also found a solution to the dramatic political crisis in your country. A solution based on democratic principles, decency and common sense. And through your Friendship Treaty with Bulgaria and the Prespa Agreement with Greece, you have become champions of political rationalism and political maturity in your region. These achievements are truly impressive, internationally recognised and should not be wasted by the EU.

When the EU leaders met in June, three months ago, they committed to deliver a "clear and substantive" decision – in October – on whether to open accession talks with you and your neighbour, Albania.

I expressed my personal views clearly back in June: your country, within the last two years, has done everything that was expected of you for the EU to be able to launch the negotiations in line with the European Commission's recommendation. That continues to be my strong conviction. Your country has done everything.

That is also why I came to North Macedonia today. I wish to make it crystal clear: there is no doubt in Brussels about your political commitment to the rule of law and to fighting corruption. Of course, anybody can at anytime and anywhere do more, especially when it comes to implementation. But we know very well that your government is determined and consistent in this, also as regards the continuation of the work of the Special Prosecutor's Office.

Finally, allow me one metaphor. The EU accession process resembles a marathon more than a 100 metres sprint. And as a dedicated runner, I know what I am talking about. To reach the finish line, continued strength, endurance and focus is needed. And sometimes, I should also say, patience. I have no doubt that North Macedonia possesses more than enough of all these qualities. And everyone should appreciate it.

Skopje is the best possible place where I would like to appeal to the leaders of the European Union: Now you do your share. Because North Macedonia has already done its share. Thank you.

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## Collecting litter and data to combat plastic pollution



Image © Nils Nedel on Unsplash

Starting this week, more than 57,000 Danish children make an [effort to clean up the country's nature from plastic pollution and gather data](#) for research and the EEA's Marine Litter Watch database. The nationwide initiative is part of an annual science week, organised by [Astra](#), a national centre for science learning, and [MarinePlastic](#), centre for research in marine plastic pollution.

Plastic pollution damages the environment, valuable materials are lost, and cleaning up is very difficult. There is also a growing concern over micro- and nanoplastics' impact on animals and humans. "Beating plastic pollution has become one of the top priorities in Europe and globally and, by collecting both litter and data, these children make a real effort to tackle the problem. It is truly inspirational to see children shape their future in this way and a reminder for us all about the urgency of action. In Europe, we need to lead the way towards a circular, low-carbon economy and part of that effort is cutting down on single-use plastics.", said Hans Bruyninckx, EEA Executive Director.

The EEA [Marine Litter Watch](#) initiative aims to combat plastic pollution by using research conducted, at least partly, by members of the public and mobile-phone technology. Volunteers use the Marine Litter Watch app to form communities that collect litter from beaches and send data on the items to

the EEA. Last year, the EEA published an [analysis on the data registered until 2017](#), which identified disposable plastic as by far the biggest contributor to marine litter.

The Danish initiative coincides with the [#EUBeachCleanup campaign](#), which also uses EEA's Marine Litter Watch platform. Organised by the European Union, the United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe (UNRIC), the global network of United Nations Information Centres (UNICs) and the Smurfs, the campaign aims to inspire all EU delegations, UNICs and partners around the world to organise an activity around the World Clean-up Day, on Saturday 21 September 2019.

The Marine Litter Watch app is available for Android and iOS devices. The app can be downloaded, free of charge, from [Google Play](#) and the [App Store](#).

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## [Mergers: Commission clears E.ON's acquisition of Innogy, subject to conditions](#)

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition by E.ON of Innogy's distribution and consumer solutions business as well as certain of its electricity generation assets. The approval is conditional on full compliance with a commitments package offered by E.ON.

Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said: *"It is important that all Europeans and businesses can buy electricity and gas at competitive prices. Today, we can approve the acquisition of Innogy by E.ON because the commitments offered by E.ON will ensure that the merger will not lead to less choice and higher prices in the countries where these companies operate."*

E.ON and RWE, which controls Innogy, are both energy companies based in Germany. They are active across the energy supply chain, from generation and wholesale to distribution and retail supply of electricity and gas. They are each active in several Member States but their activities mostly overlap in Czechia, Germany, Hungary, Slovakia and the UK. The two companies are engaged in a complex asset swap. Following this asset swap, E.ON will focus on the distribution and retail supply of electricity and gas, whereas RWE will be primarily active in upstream electricity generation and wholesale markets.

Today's decision follows an [in-depth investigation](#) of E.ON's proposed acquisition of Innogy's distribution and consumer solutions business as well as certain electricity generation assets of Innogy.

The Commission approved on 26 February 2019, under the EU Merger Regulation,

another part of the asset swap, namely [RWE's acquisition of certain generation assets](#) held by E.ON (case [M.8871](#)).

### **The Commission's investigation**

During its in-depth investigation, the Commission gathered extensive information and received feedback from competitors and customers of the merging companies, as well as from other stakeholders.

Following its investigation, the Commission had concerns that the transaction, as initially notified, would have significantly reduced competition in the following markets:

- **German market for the supply of electricity for heating purposes:** the merger would eliminate an important competitive constraint as the merging companies are the two largest suppliers of heating electricity and smaller retailers typically face material barriers to enter/expand.
- **German market for the supply of electric vehicle charging stations on motorways:** the companies are two of a very limited number of suppliers who operate (or plan to operate) electric charging stations on German motorways and in many instances their stations are in direct competition as they are located close to each other.
- **Czech market for the retail supply of gas (to all customers) and electricity (to households and small businesses),** the companies are strong suppliers and closely compete. The merger would remove the effective competitive constraint that they currently exert on each other.
- **Hungarian market for the retail supply of electricity to unregulated businesses:** the companies are two of three major retailers active in the country and exert a significant competitive pressure on each other that would be lost with the merger.

The in-depth investigation did not confirm the following concerns that the Commission initially had relating to the retail supply of electricity:

- In **Germany**, the market is highly fragmented with a large number of credible retailers and new companies regularly entering the market. The Commission found no evidence of a loss of significant competition as a result of the transaction.
- In **Slovakia**, the merging companies have traditionally focused on different regions within the country and have therefore exerted a limited competition on each other. The Commission found no evidence that the companies would increasingly compete against each other in the future in the absence of the merger.

### **The proposed remedies**

To address the Commission's competition concerns, E.ON offered the following commitments:

- To divest most of E.ON's customers supplied with heating electricity in Germany and, at the option of the purchaser, all assets that may be

needed to operate effectively in the market;

- To discontinue the operation of 34 electric charging stations located on German motorways. These stations will be operated by a new third party supplier in the future;
- To divest E.ON's business in the retail supply of electricity to unregulated customers in Hungary, including all assets and staff;
- To divest Innogy's entire business in the retail supply of electricity and gas in Czechia, including all assets and staff.

The Commission found that the divested assets and the discontinued charging stations, each constitute viable businesses that would enable suitable buyers to compete effectively with the merged entity in the relevant markets in the future.

The Commission therefore concluded that the transaction, as modified by the commitments, would no longer raise competition concerns. This decision is conditional upon the full compliance with the commitments.

### **Companies and products**

**E.ON**, based in Germany, is an energy company currently active across the whole energy chain. Following the completion of the asset swap with RWE, E.ON will focus on the distribution and retail supply of electricity and gas. E.ON is active in several European countries.

**Innogy**, controlled by RWE and based in Germany, is also an energy company active across the energy supply chain, including distribution, retail supply and energy-related activities. Innogy is active in several European countries.

### **Merger control rules and procedures**

The Commission has the duty to assess mergers and acquisitions involving companies with a turnover above certain thresholds (see Article 1 of the [Merger Regulation](#)) and to prevent concentrations that would significantly impede effective competition in the EEA or any substantial part of it.

The vast majority of notified mergers do not pose competition problems and are cleared after a routine review. From the moment a transaction is notified, the Commission generally has a total of 25 working days to decide whether to grant approval (Phase I) or to start an in-depth investigation (Phase II).

There are currently three on-going phase II merger investigation: the proposed [acquisition of Lotos by PKN Orlen](#), the proposed [acquisition of Bonnier Broadcasting by Telia Company](#) and the proposed [acquisition of Aleris by Novelis](#). More information will be available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the [public case register](#) under the case number [M.8870](#).

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## Asylum applications up by 26% in July, but remain dramatically lower than during the 2015-2016 crisis

*Member States processed, and rejected, more applications.*

In July 2019, the monthly number of applications for international protection lodged in the 30 EU+ countries (European Union Member States plus Norway and Switzerland) reached approximately 62,900, a 26% increase compared to June. This is slightly higher than in July 2018 (59,375) and roughly the same as in July 2017 (62,040).

Since the start of the year, some 400,500 applications were lodged in the EU+, up by 11% compared to the same period of 2018. This increase has roughly remained uniform throughout 2019, suggesting that this year's increases when compared to 2018 are stable so far, broadly returning to 2017 levels. **These levels remain dramatically lower than during the 2015-2016 migration crisis.** July 2016 saw almost 122,000 applications in the EU+.

**Syrians, Afghans and Venezuelans lodged a quarter of all applications.** The top 10 countries of origin in July also included Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey, Colombia, Iran, Nigeria and Albania. Citizens of these ten countries (plus the vast majority of the top 40 citizenships) all lodged more applications than in June, especially nationals from Turkey, Pakistan, Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. Compared to June, applications grew more sharply among nationals of countries in need of a visa to enter the EU+, than among nationals of visa-liberalised countries. Nevertheless, applicants from visa-liberalised countries continued to account for a quarter of all applications lodged in the EU+.

In parallel with applications lodged, **there was also an increase in first-instance decisions** issued by EU+ countries' national authorities. The output reached almost 51,000 decisions, one of the highest levels in the past year, and up by 22% from June. More than one third (35%) of all first-instance decisions in July granted either refugee status or subsidiary protection, compared to 39% in 2018 (total for the year).

At the end of July, there were still some 456,000 applications awaiting a decision in first instance in the EU+. A similar number was pending in appeal or review.

For more information and an interactive data-visualisation, please visit the [Latest Asylum Trends](#) page.

**Any further information may be obtained from the European Asylum Support Office on the following email address: [press@easo.europa.eu](mailto:press@easo.europa.eu).**

## Healthy Workplaces Good Practice Awards highlight examples of managing dangerous substances in the workplace

The 2018-19 competition is a key part of EU-OSHA's [Healthy Workplaces Manage Dangerous Substances](#) campaign. Dr Christa Sedlatschek, EU-OSHA's Executive Director, commented on the merit of the awards: *'We are delighted to see so many strong and varied examples of good occupational safety and health practice in the context of managing dangerous substances. The winning examples are from enterprises and organisations of a wide variety of sizes and from various sectors, all with a common goal: to create a culture of prevention and protect workers from dangerous substances.'*

Six organisations were awarded:

- the **Czech** pharmaceutical company **VAKOS XT, a.s.**, which worked with the Ministry of the Interior to develop a programme of measures to protect public service personnel from exposure to illegal narcotics during police actions in illegal drug laboratories, etc.;
- **Eiffage Infrastructures**, a large **French** company in the road construction and maintenance sector that developed a new technique to completely eliminate the use of hazardous solvents in its analytical laboratories;
- the **German Federal Association of Glazier Trades**, which developed and facilitated the implementation of a safe and economical technique for the handling of asbestos-containing materials;
- **Peluquería Elvira**, a small hairdressing and beauty salon that eliminated hazardous substances and also transformed working conditions in other salons throughout **Spain**;
- **Atlas Copco Industrial Technique AB**, a manufacturing company from **Sweden** that fostered a culture of participation and collaboration and implemented collective measures to protect workers from potentially hazardous carbon nanotubes;
- a small farming business in **the Netherlands**, **Mansholt BV**, that, in collaboration with the national sectoral body for OSH, implemented a range of technical and organisational measures to protect workers from hazardous dust.

A further four organisations were commended: the **Vienna Ombuds Office for Environmental Protection**, Austria; the construction company **BAM Ireland**, Ireland; **Gorenje, d.d.**, a Slovenian manufacturing company; and the **British Occupational Hygiene Society**, United Kingdom.

Entries were first judged at national level and up to two winners from each

country were nominated for the pan-European competition. The European jury looked at how good practices were implemented, how **risk assessment** was carried out and how the **STOP principle** was followed – that is, how a hierarchical approach to prevention, prioritising substitution, followed by technical, organisational and, finally, personal protective measures, was taken. The jury also considered whether or not interventions lead to **real and demonstrable improvements** in OSH through a **holistic approach** involving **worker participation** and the **commitment of management**. The interventions selected are **sustainable** over time, **transferable** to other organisations or Member States, and go above and beyond **national legislative requirements**.

To celebrate these organisations' contributions to improving safety and health and to raise awareness of the good practices implemented, each of the awarded organisations will receive a trophy and each of the commended organisations will receive a certificate at a **special ceremony** at the **Healthy Workplaces Summit** in Bilbao in November.

[Learn about the awarded and commended examples in our Good Practice Awards booklet](#)

[Visit the Healthy Workplaces Manage Dangerous Substances website](#)