

## Tourism trips – Three quarters of all trips by EU residents are within their own country – Majority of the trips are made by car

In 2017, EU residents made 1.3 billion trips with overnight stays that amounted to almost 6.4 billion nights. The average trip length was 5.1 nights. Compared with 2016, the number of tourism trips by EU residents increased by 4%. Three quarters (73%) of all trips were spent within the country of residence (domestic trips), while one quarter (27%) were abroad (outbound trips), of which 21% to other EU countries and 6% to destinations outside the EU.

[Full text available on EUROSTAT website](#)

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## State aid: Commission invites comments on simplified rules for State aid combined with EU support

The European Commission is inviting Member States and other stakeholders to comment on its proposal to exempt from prior Commission scrutiny under EU State aid rules aid granted through national funds for projects supported under certain EU centrally managed programmes.

Commissioner Margrethe Vestager, in charge of competition policy, stated: *“State aid principles must be respected – so if this can be done when certain EU funding rules are applied, this should be fine. Then we can evade red tape and gain speed in decision making. Our proposal aims to facilitate the combinations of national and EU funds by exempting certain aid from prior notification and scrutiny under EU State aid rules. We encourage all public authorities, companies and others that could be concerned to participate in this important consultation.”*

The Commission is seeking to facilitate the national funding (including from EU Cohesion funds managed at national level) of projects or financial products, which fall under the scope of EU centrally managed programmes under the next Multiannual Financial Framework. To this end, the rules on EU funding and State aid rules applicable to these types of funding should be aligned to avoid unnecessary complexities, while at the same time preserving competition in the EU Single market.

In this context, with the aim to improve the interplay between EU funding rules and EU State aid rules, the Commission is proposing to streamline the State aid rules applicable to national funding of projects or financial products which fall under the scope of certain EU programmes.

Therefore, the Commission has launched today a first public consultation on a targeted review of the General Block Exemption Regulation (GBER), in order to extend its application, under a limited set of conditions, to national funds involved in **the following three areas**:

1. Financing and investment operations supported by the InvestEU Fund;
2. Research, Development and Innovation (RD&I) projects having received a “Seal of Excellence” under Horizon Europe, as well as projects under the future Co-fund programme;
3. European Territorial Cooperation (ETC) projects, known as Interreg policy.

Exempting aid in these areas from the obligation of prior notification to and approval by the Commission would be a major simplification. This would be possible because of the safeguards embedded in EU programmes managed centrally by the Commission. In particular, the Commission ensures that support granted in the context of these programmes targets a common interest objective, addresses a market failure or socio-economic cohesion objectives and is limited to the minimum amount necessary.

The public consultation launched today seeks the views of the relevant stakeholders (including Member States) on the proposed revision of the GBER. Stakeholders are invited to submit comments on today’s consultation by 27 September 2019.

The Commission aims to adopt the final revised text in time for the next Multiannual Financial Framework, to ensure that all rules are in place sufficiently in advance before the new funding period starts in 2021.

The draft amending Regulation and all details about the public consultation are available at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/competition/consultations/2019\\_gber/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/competition/consultations/2019_gber/index_en.html)

## **Background**

Article 108(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) requires Member States to notify all State aid to the European Commission and to implement it only after the Commission’s approval. The EU State aid Enabling [Regulation](#) allows the Commission to declare that certain categories of State aid are compatible with the Internal Market and exempted from the notification obligation provided for in the Treaty.

The GBER declares specific categories of State aid compatible with the Treaty, provided that they fulfil clear conditions, and exempts these categories from the requirement of prior notification and approval to the Commission. This allows Member States to implement such measures directly, with full legal certainty. The 2014 [General Block Exemption Regulation](#)

enabled Member States to implement a wide range of State aid measures without prior Commission approval because they are unlikely to distort competition and has been modified several times to simplify the rules and increase the scope. As a result, since 2015, more than 96% of new State aid measures for which expenditure was reported for the first time did not require notification to the Commission. This is in line with the Commission's approach to be 'big on big things and small on small things' – to focus on delivering more and faster, while doing less where it is perceived not to have an added value.

To facilitate the implementation of the next Multilateral Financial Framework and to improve the interplay between EU fund rules and State aid rules, the Council of the EU, following a Commission proposal adopted in June 2018, adopted in November 2018, an amendment to the EU's State aid Enabling Regulation (Council Regulation (EU) 2015/1588). Based on the revised Enabling Regulation, the Commission is entitled to make targeted modifications to the GBER.

In addition to the public consultation launched today, the proposed revised text of the GBER will also be subject to a second round of consultation and will be discussed in two Advisory Committee Meetings between the Commission and Member States. This process will ensure that Member States and stakeholders have sufficient opportunities to comment on the draft Commission proposal.

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## **15 arrests in theft of Galileo and Newton original books**

The Hague, 26 June 2019

**In a joint action day, the Romanian, UK and Italian authorities arrested 15 suspects involved in the theft of 260 priceless antique books with an estimated value of more than €2 million. The books, which included original editions of Galileo Galilei and Isaac Newton, were stolen by a highly sophisticated international organised crime group (OCG), known to the authorities for committing a large number of burglaries throughout Europe. Eurojust established a joint investigation team with the countries involved and Europol to decide and execute a joint strategy to ensure that all suspects are apprehended. With the active participation of Eurojust, an operational centre was set up at Europol to coordinate the national authorities' simultaneous operations, which led to the arrest of 15 suspects, several hearings and 45 searches.**

In January 2017, the OCG members broke into a warehouse in Feltham, UK, in which the books were stored, with their owners' permission, to be shipped for display at a book fair in Los Angeles. The books, which belonged to

individuals from various EU countries, included rare first editions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The OCG members, who were of Romanian nationality, stole the books by avoiding all security systems and left the UK together with the stolen books.

Eurojust and Europol facilitated the close cooperation between the judicial and law enforcement authorities of Romania, the UK and Italy, which resulted in bringing down this notorious OCG. Eurojust, the EU's Judicial Cooperation Unit, supported the execution of several European Arrest Warrants issued by the UK authorities towards Romania. Eurojust effectively coordinated the parallel national investigations into the case and provided substantial financial and logistical support to the joint investigation team, which was set up in 2017. During 3 coordination meetings, held at Eurojust in The Hague, and 4 operational meetings at Europol, all countries involved swiftly exchanged case-related information and evidence, solved judicial issues as they arose, and decided on the best place to prosecute.



The Romanian Directorate for Investigating Organized Crime and Terrorism (DIICOT), the Romanian National Police, the UK Metropolitan Police Service Specialist Crime South and the Italian *Carabinieri* Special Unit for the Protection of Cultural Heritage participated in today's joint action.

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## [ESMA issues opinions on product intervention measures by Germany, Spain, Bulgaria, Denmark, Latvia and Greece](#)

The European Securities and Markets Authority (ESMA) has today issued eight positive opinions on product intervention measures taken by the National Competent Authorities (NCAs) of Germany, Spain, Bulgaria, Denmark, Latvia and Greece. ESMA's opinion finds that the proposed measures are justified and proportionate and that it is necessary for NCAs of other Member States to take product intervention measures that are at least as stringent as ESMA's measures.

ESMA's has issued opinions on national product intervention measures from:

### **Background**

NCA's may take product intervention measures in accordance with Article 42 of Regulation (EU) No 600/2014. At least one month before a measure is intended to take effect, an NCA must notify all other NCA's and ESMA of the details of its proposed measure and the related evidence, unless there is an exceptional case where it is necessary to take urgent action.

In accordance with Article 43 of Regulation (EU) No 600/2014, ESMA performs a facilitation and coordination role in relation to such product intervention measures taken by NCA's. After receiving notification from an NCA of its proposed measure, ESMA must adopt an opinion on whether the proposed measure is justified and proportionate. If ESMA considers that the taking of a measure by other NCA's is necessary, it must state this in its opinion.

The opinions that ESMA previously issued on proposed national product intervention measures are published on its [website](#).