

## European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: Council agrees its position

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## European Commission Reaction to the article published in Libération on 15 March 2019\*

The European Commission rejects the content of the [article](#) in the strongest possible terms. It is based on entirely wrong claims and anonymous “sources”. It makes unacceptable allegations that have nothing to do with the reality of what is a very sad personal story that – out of respect for the victim and her family – should have no place in the public domain.

The passing of our brilliant colleague, Director in the Legal Service, who is referred to in the article, was a shock to all of us who had the privilege and the chance to know her and work with her.

The Belgian police conducted an investigation and communicated to the European Commission’s Security Directorate on 17 December at 12:40h CET that it was suicide in a private context.

The Secretary-General of the European Commission barely knew the colleague in question. He had met her only twice – including as part of a bigger meeting. He did not have any contact with her beyond these two meetings; neither did

he ever call her.

The claims and insinuations made in this article are unacceptable, malicious and disrespectful – in particular towards the victim and her family but also towards the European Commission as an institution, at a moment when the President and this House are in the middle of very delicate negotiations and processes of critical importance to our Union.

It is the European Commission as an institution that has taken all the decisions related to the appointment of its Secretary-General; it is the European Commission as an institution that has replied to the European Parliament; it is the European Commission as an institution that has replied to the Ombudsman. The decisions of the Commission in this respect are always prepared in cooperation with all the competent services and not by a single person; and they are always taken by the institution and not by a single person.

Using a personal tragedy in such a way is simply inhumane and beyond belief.

### **Point by Point**

*'The European Commission was forced to defend the irregular appointment of Martin Selmayr, former Chief of Staff of Jean-Claude Juncker, as Secretary-General of the institution.'*

Laura Pignataro was Director for European Civil Service Law in the Legal Service and as such worked on questions relating to the EU Staff Regulations. This was simply her field of competence.

*'The problem is that the Legal Service was not consulted about Selmayr's appointment upstream, as it should have been [...], because they knew it would have opposed this scheming.'*

There is no obligation to consult the Legal Service on senior management appointments. The decision was proposed and adopted unanimously at the meeting of the College on 21 February 2018. The Director-General of the Legal Service was present at the meeting. Any Member of the College can request the opinion of the Legal Service during College meetings which the Director-General of the Legal Service always attends.

*'A meeting is called by Juncker's cabinet on 24 March 2018 at 14.30 to draft the replies. There are 10 people around the table, including, for the Legal Service, the Spaniard Luis Romero, Director-General, the German Bernd Martenczuk, his assistant, and Laura Pignataro. But, right in the middle of the meeting, Martin Selmayr, accompanied by his henchwoman Mina Andreeva from the Spokesperson's Service, enters the room. Romero immediately gets up and leaves the room.'*

The Director-General of the Legal Service did not leave the meeting. The two colleagues from the Legal Service who were present in the room worked all the time under the supervision of the Director-General of the Legal Service.

*'Because the arrival of the Secretary-General at a meeting intended to*

*prepare his defence constitutes a major conflict of interest.'*

As stated above, Luis Romero did not leave the room and certainly not because of an alleged conflict of interest since there was no conflict of interest: the answers were drafted under the authority of the Commissioner for Budget and Human Resources with the support of the Directorate-General in charge of Human Resources and Security, the Commission's Legal Service and the Cabinet of the President. The Secretary-General contributed to correctly establish the replies relating to him in order to ensure that they are complete and exhaustive.

*"Rather than leaving, Romero should have made Selmayr leave the room, which he did not do. And Pignataro did not dare to follow him on her own initiative: 'Romero coldly dropped her. He left her on her own,' said a witness."*

As stated above, there was no conflict of interest. Second, at no point, Laura Pignataro was left alone. Luis Romero and his assistant, Bernd Martenczuk, were present at all times.

*'A lawyer himself, it is he who dictates the replies to be given on 24 March...'*

Martin Selmayr contributed to correctly establish the replies relating to him in order to ensure that these are complete and exhaustive. He certainly did not dictate answers.

*"The replies are prepared on 2 April 2018 by the same team and, like the first time, Selmayr turns up. 'Coming out of these meetings, Laura was in a rage: she knew she had been party to an unlawful conflict of interest,' says a friend."*

2 April 2018 was Easter Monday. There were no meetings on this day. Laura Pignataro participated only in one meeting in which answers to the European Parliament questions were discussed: on 24 March 2018. There were no further such meetings in which she participated involving the team referred to.

*"'I cannot lie to her, it's impossible, I gave all the files to the Ombudsman,' she told me,' says a close friend."*

It was the Secretariat-General's Unit in charge of relations with the Ombudsman who was the interlocutor of the Ombudsman in the inquiry. It provided the European Ombudsman with approximately 11,000 pages of documentation. It was on that basis that the Ombudsman prepared her findings – to which the European Commission replied as well. At no point did Laura Pignataro pass emails to or engaged with the Ombudsman. This was all done through the aforementioned Secretariat-General's unit.

*'Selmayr then realises that Pignataro is the source of these leaks. He instructs her to answer the Ombudsman and forbids her to tell anybody about it. She is again forced to lie here. The Secretary-General sometimes calls her in the middle of the night to give instructions...'*

This is simply invented. The Secretary-General did not call Laura Pignataro. He met Laura Pignataro only twice: once in May 2016 when in his function as Head of Cabinet of the President and on the basis of a shortlist presented by the Director-General of the Legal Service, he recommended to the President to support the proposal from the Commissioner for Budget and Human Resources for the appointment of Laura Pignataro by the Commission as Director in the Legal Service. And then on 24 March 2018 as part of the large meeting working on the replies to the European Parliament questions. As stated, above, he never tasked her to work on the replies to the Ombudsman. He met her only twice, he never called her.

*'She seemed terrified by Selmayr's hostility'*

As explained above, the Secretary-General had only met Laura Pignataro twice and they had no contact at all beyond this.

*'The Eurocrats at the Legal Service discover the drama by a message published on their intranet and not on the general thread:'*

The announcement was published on my My IntraComm – the European Commission's intranet webpage which is accessible to all Commission colleagues.

*'Neither Martin Selmayr, nor Günther Oettinger, the Commissioner responsible for administration, nor Jean-Claude Juncker deemed it necessary to pass on their condolences to the family.'*

The Secretary-General did want to send a personal condolence letter to the family of the deceased but refrained from doing so following the explicit advice of the Director-General of the Legal Service who pointed to the delicate private circumstances. Several members of the Commission staff were present, including members of the President's Cabinet.

*"However, 'that day, all officials received a message from Selmayr wishing us happy holidays. We were all shocked,' says one of Laura Pignataro's friends."*

The Secretary-General sent only one email to the entire Commission staff, namely on 1 March 2018, the day of taking up his new duties. The Christmas message was sent only to the staff of the Secretariat-General and other staff working directly with him.

*'Yet Selmayr knew Pignataro, as he had appointed her to her position and worked with her for twelve months.'*

As stated above, Martin Selmayr in 2016, as Head of Cabinet of the President had lent his support to appoint Laura Pignataro as Director in the Legal Service but the two never worked directly together.

*'As soon as news of her death is known, the Commission's security services seal her office. It is still sealed today.'*

Since January, Laura Pignataro's office is no longer sealed.

*'The EU executive refuses to reveal if internal investigations have been*

*conducted into the reasons for this suicide: Burn-out? Psychological harassment? Personal problems?’*

The Belgian police conducted an investigation and communicated to the European Commission’s Security Directorate on 17 December at 12:40h CET that it was suicide in a private context.

*‘But nothing on the absence of condolence or any possible psychological harassment which Laura Pignataro might have suffered:’*

There was no harassment. The Secretary-General barely knew Laura Pignataro.

*‘Could there be reasons other than professional ones to explain what she did?’*

The Belgian police conducted an investigation and communicated to the European Commission’s Security Directorate on 17 December at 12:40h CET that it was suicide in a private context.

*‘We already know that Selmayr is going to appoint one of his faithful, another German like him.’*

The post has been published but the selection procedure has not even started.

\*[Please note that the authentic version of the extracts from the Libération article quoted above is only in French.]

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## [EU report: Stepping up bilateral cooperation with the perspective of concluding a new comprehensive EU-Azerbaijan agreement](#)

The EU [report](#) published today sets out the state of play of developments in Azerbaijan since [the last meeting of the Cooperation Council on 9 February 2018](#), and comes ahead of the upcoming EU-Azerbaijan Cooperation Council, scheduled to take place on 4 April in Brussels. The report focuses on key developments and reforms undertaken and reports on bilateral dialogues that took place.

High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission, Federica **Mogherini**, said: *“We have stepped up our cooperation with Azerbaijan, which is a key partner in our neighbourhood. The negotiations on a comprehensive new EU-Azerbaijan agreement are entering a decisive phase and we will keep working hard to achieve a modern agreement*

*that addresses all aspects of our relationship, and that benefits citizens from both the European Union and Azerbaijan”.*

Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes **Hahn** said: *“The European Union is providing strong support to Azerbaijan’s economic diversification and reform efforts, including in the key sectors of education, agriculture and rural development. The Partnership Priorities and the Eastern Partnership 20 deliverables for 2020 are guiding our future cooperation, including stronger people-to-people contacts and support to stronger connectivity, governance and economy in Azerbaijan. The EU will continue engaging with the authorities to support an enabling environment for civil society and the improvement of human rights and fundamental freedoms.”*

Human rights and fundamental freedoms in Azerbaijan remain in need of improvement, in particular to increase space for civil society activities and remove the constraints on the freedoms of expression and of the media. The legislative measures related to the Bar Association, introduced in 2018 have put lawyers of human rights defenders under increased pressure.

The [EU is Azerbaijan’s first economic partner](#), representing the majority of its trade and foreign investments and organised a successful EU-Azerbaijan Business Forum in June 2018. A new comprehensive EU-Azerbaijan agreement would offer the opportunity to further broaden our areas of cooperation. Since [the last Cooperation Council in February 2018](#), the EU and Azerbaijan have made significant progress in the negotiations.

Recent reforms and Azerbaijan’s wider modernisation agenda in sectors such as agriculture, tourism, education and transport contribute to the diversification of the economy and support Azerbaijan’s ambition to become a transport and logistics hub.

The European Union and Azerbaijan will continue to cooperate in all areas of mutual interest, in full respect of shared interests and commitments, in particular in the framework of the Partnership Priorities where the European Union stands ready to provide the necessary assistance.

#### **For More Information**

[Full text of the 2019 Report on EU-Azerbaijan relations](#)

[EU-Azerbaijan relations factsheet](#)

[Website of the European Union Delegation to Azerbaijan](#)

[Eastern Partnership 20 Deliverables for 2020 state of play factsheet](#)

[Partnership Priorities between the EU and Azerbaijan reinforce the bilateral agenda](#)

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## Daily News 15 / 03 / 2019

### **Statement by President Juncker on the terrorist attacks in Christchurch, New Zealand**

The President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude **Juncker**, issued the following statement this morning on the terrorist attacks in Christchurch, New Zealand: *"It was with horror and profound sadness that I learnt of the terrorist attack on the Muslim community in Christchurch, New Zealand. I offer my sincerest condolences to the loved ones of the victims and the community as a whole. We wish strength and courage to the injured and their families. [...] The European Union mourns with you today and we will always stand with you against those who heinously want to destroy our societies and our way of life."* The full statement is available [online](#). High Representative/Vice-President Federica **Mogherini** also issued a statement this morning expressing her full solidarity with the people and authorities of New Zealand at this extremely difficult time. *"Attacks on places of worship are attacks on all of us who value diversity and freedom of religion and expression"*, she said in a [statement](#). *"Such acts strengthen our resolve to tackle, together with the whole international community, the global challenges of terrorism, extremism and hatred."* (For more information: Margaritis Schinas – Tel.: +32 229 60524; Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 229 91382; Maja Kocijancic – Tel.: +32 229 86570)

### **Syria crisis: EU mobilises renewed international support, record overall pledge of €8.3 billion for 2019 and beyond**

From 12-14 March 2019 the European Union and the United Nations co-chaired the [Brussels III Conference on "Supporting the future of Syria and the region"](#). The Conference renewed the international community support to a lasting political solution to end the Syria crisis and addressed the most critical humanitarian and resilience issues affecting Syrians inside their country and refugees and their host communities in particular in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The Conference succeeded in mobilising pledges totalling €8.3 billion for 2019-20 and beyond. Of the overall pledge, around two thirds come from the European Union which has contributed a total of €6.79 billion: €2.57 billion from the EU budget managed by the European Commission and €4.22 billion from EU Member States. High Representative/Vice-President Federica **Mogherini** said: *"Our goal remains the same: a Syrian-led, Syrian-owned political process, facilitated by the United Nations, to establish an inclusive and non-sectarian governance for a united Syria. This is what we are all trying to work for and this is also the main reason why we convened the Brussels Conference. All of us must use our leverage to relaunch the Geneva negotiations and put an end to the war in Syria. Freezing the conflict at its current stage is not a solution."* Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Johannes **Hahn** said: *"A whole generation that has no experience of what is 'normal' still needs us. The EU, as the leading global*

donor for this crisis, will continue to support Syria's neighbours to strengthen resilience and their economies. We will step up investment in education, healthcare and regular employment so refugees become more self-reliant and can live in dignity and normality". Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos **Stylianides** added: "Inside Syria, the humanitarian situation remains a nightmare for millions of people. The EU is doing all it can to support our partners to deliver aid, but access remains a serious problem. We continue to call on all parties to allow lifesaving aid to reach people in need. We are committed to help the Syrian people for as long as it takes." The two "[Days of Dialogue](#)" were attended by hundreds of representatives of Syrian, regional, and international non-governmental and civil society organisations. Participants had the opportunity to exchange with the international community at the European Parliament. The final [press release](#) and the [joint statement](#) are available online. More information on the [Conference](#) and on the EU response to the Syrian crisis, our [factsheet](#) and infographics on the EU response to the Syrian crisis in [Jordan](#), [Lebanon](#), [Turkey](#) and [inside Syria](#) are available online. Find our social media campaign [#TheyareSyria](#) [here](#). (For more information: Maja Kocijancic – Tel.: +32 229 86570; Carlos Martin Ruiz De Gordejuela – Tel.: +32 229 65322; Matteo Arisci – Tel.: +32 229 80833; Alceo Smerilli – Tel.: +32 229 64887; Daniel Puglisi – Tel.: +32 229 69140)

## **Capital Markets Union: Commission reports on progress achieved ahead of European Council**

Today, the Commission takes stock of the progress achieved in building a Single Market for capital, including as regards sustainable finance, and calls on EU leaders to keep up the political engagement to lay down the foundation of the [Capital Markets Union](#). The CMU aims to make it easier for EU companies to get the finance they need to grow. By breaking down barriers for cross-border investments in the EU, the CMU is an important Single Market project. It is part of the Juncker Commission's ambition to sustain growth in Europe, invest in innovation and promote the EU's global competitiveness. At the same time, the CMU aims to direct investment to environmentally friendly projects, thereby contributing to the EU's sustainable and carbon-neutral agenda. A strong Capital Markets Union is also necessary to complement the Banking Union and to strengthen the Economic and Monetary Union and the international role of the euro. Following the [last progress report in November 2018](#) and the [call by EU leaders for ambitious progress](#) by spring 2019 on the Capital Markets Union, today's Communication takes stocks of substantial achievements with political compromises reached on several Commission's proposals, as well as important non-legislative actions. Valdis **Dombrovskis**, Vice-President responsible for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, said: "The Commission has delivered the essential building blocks of the Capital Markets Union. We need sustained engagement from the European Parliament and Member States to complete this effort. The success of the Capital Markets Union depends on the actions of Member States and stakeholders at national and EU level, through their national reforms and actions." Jyrki **Katainen**, Vice-President responsible for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness said: "By more efficiently connecting companies and investors across borders, the Capital Markets Union



*is essential to get companies, especially small ones, the financing they need to grow, thereby delivering on the Juncker Commission's priority to boost investment, jobs and growth." The Commission has delivered all the measures it has committed to in the [CMU action plan of September 2015](#) and in the [mid-term review of June 2017](#), contributing to laying key building blocks of the CMU. Moreover, the Commission adopted two Delegated Regulations containing most implementing measures to finalise the [Prospectus reform](#), another important milestone towards the completion of the Capital Markets Union. Please find a [press release](#), [MEMO](#) and [Factsheet](#) online. (For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Letizia Lupini – Tel.: +32 229 51958)*

### **A Europe that Protects: implementing the EU's Action Plan against disinformation and measures to secure free and fair elections [updated 15/03/19 at 13:20]**

With the European elections fast approaching, the European Commission and the European External Action Service, in coordination and cooperation with the other EU institutions and EU Member States, have stepped up their action to make sure that our citizens' choices are free from manipulation, disinformation, or any interference coming from inside or outside the EU. To this end, implementation of the [EU Action Plan against disinformation, presented by the Commission and the High Representative on 5 December 2018](#), is fully underway. Furthermore, in February 2019 the Commission [published reports](#) by Facebook, Google and Twitter (signatories of the [Code of Practice](#)), covering the progress made on their commitments to fight disinformation. On this occasion, the Commission asked the platforms to accelerate their efforts as well as to do more across all Member States to help ensure the integrity of the European Parliament elections in May 2019. Vice-President **Ansip**, Commissioners **Jourová**, **King**, and **Gabriel** will meet representatives of online platforms on Tuesday to discuss further progress on the implementation of the Code of Practice. On Monday, the [Rapid Alert System](#), which was one of the key deliverables under the [Action Plan](#), will be launched. The Rapid Alert System aims to strengthen coordination, analysis and joint responses to disinformation through creating a dedicated digital platform for a network of contact points from the 28 EU Member States and the EU institutions, working in close cooperation with the European Election Cooperation Network. Following up on the [measures](#) presented to secure free and fair elections as part of the State of the Union Address of President **Juncker** in September 2018, Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, **Věra Jourová**, [has written](#) to national political parties calling on them to ensure transparency of political advertising, to be ready to face cyberattacks and to respect European data protection rules during the campaign. (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Maja Kocijancic – Tel.: +32 229 86570)

### **Le Plan Juncker aide les entreprises bulgares à pleinement bénéficier des technologies numériques**

En Bulgarie, le [Plan d'investissement pour l'Europe](#) – le Plan Juncker –

soutient un prêt de 18 millions d'euros de la Banque européenne d'investissement (BEI) à l'entreprise Software Group qui aide les acteurs de la finance et des télécoms à introduire le numérique dans leurs services. Le financement aidera l'entreprise à développer sa stratégie de recherche et développement et à gagner de nouveaux marchés. En outre, la BEI a aujourd'hui signé un prêt de 20 millions d'euros à l'institution financière Raiffeisen Leasing Bulgaria, pour soutenir 300 petites et moyennes entreprises (PME). La commissaire pour l'économie et la société numériques, Mariya **Gabriel**, a dit : « Avec 43 milliards d'euros d'investissements supplémentaires mobilisés dans le secteur du numérique, le Plan Juncker aide les entreprises européennes à réussir efficacement leur processus de transformation numérique. Je me félicite de ces deux nouveaux accords, en particulier de l'accent mis sur les PME. J'appelle d'autres entreprises en Bulgarie à suivre ces exemples faire de même et à saisir toutes les opportunités. » Un communiqué de presse est disponible [ici](#). En février 2019, le Plan Juncker avait mobilisé 380 milliards d'euros supplémentaires en Europe, dont 2,2 milliards en Bulgarie, avec 842 000 entreprises bénéficiant d'un meilleur accès au financement. (Pour plus d'informations: Annika Breidhardt – Tél.: +32 229-56153; Sophie Dupin de Saint-Cyr – Tél.: +32 229 56169)

### **EU report: Stepping up bilateral cooperation with the perspective of concluding a new comprehensive EU-Azerbaijan agreement**

An [EU report](#) published today sets out the state of play of developments and reforms in Azerbaijan over the past 12 months. The report is released ahead of the upcoming EU-Azerbaijan Cooperation Council, scheduled for 4 April in Brussels, and gives an overview of the intensified bilateral cooperation in recent months, whereby [Partnership Priorities](#) have been endorsed, high-level security and transport dialogues have been launched, and the European Union continues to work with the Azerbaijani authorities to improve human rights and fundamental freedoms. Concluding negotiations for a new comprehensive bilateral EU-Azerbaijan agreement remains a top priority. High Representative/Vice-President Federica **Mogherini**, said: "We have stepped up our cooperation with Azerbaijan, which is a key partner in our neighbourhood. The negotiations on a comprehensive new EU-Azerbaijan agreement are entering a decisive phase and we will keep working hard to achieve a modern agreement that addresses all aspects of our relationship, and that benefits citizens from both the European Union and Azerbaijan." Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes **Hahn** said: "The European Union is providing strong support to Azerbaijan's economic diversification and reform efforts, including in the key sectors of education, agriculture and rural development. The Partnership Priorities and the Eastern Partnership [20 deliverables for 2020](#) are guiding our future cooperation, including stronger people-to-people contacts and support to stronger connectivity, governance and economy in Azerbaijan. The EU will continue engaging with the authorities to support an enabling environment for civil society and the improvement of human rights and fundamental freedoms." The [report](#), a [full press release](#), and a [factsheet on EU-Azerbaijan relations](#) are all available online. (For more information: Maja Kocijancic – Tel.: +32

229 86570; Adam Kaznowski – Tel: +32 229 89359; Alceo Smerilli – Tel.: + 32 229 64887)

### **The first EU Media Literacy Week will kick off next week**

The first [EU Media Literacy week](#) will take place from 18 – 22 March, with more than 200 events in Brussels and all around Europe. This Commission initiative aims to promote media literacy and support the fight against disinformation. Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society Mariya **Gabriel** said: *“In Europe, the teaching of Media Literacy is not systematic, it is often difficult for our citizens to distinguish between true and false information. We trust we must together support media literacy in order to ensure pluralism, inclusion and better defend our values. We have to further empower citizens to make informed choices and participate more effectively in the democratic process. This is why the European Commission is launching the first European Media Literacy Awards.”* For [the latter awards](#), more than 130 participants are competing with media literacy projects in three categories: most educative, most European, and most innovative projects. The awards ceremony will take place during a [high-level conference](#) on 19 March in Brussels, which will bring together European institutions, audiovisual regulators, media experts, journalists, representatives of Member States and citizens in order to discuss the role of media literacy navigating the modern news environment, the evolution of quality journalism in the digital world, sources of support from public authorities, and technological innovations. More information on the awards, the conference and local activities that are part of #EUMediaLiteracyWeek is available [here](#). (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083 – Marietta Grammenou Tel.: +32 229 83583)

### **Commission reports on two years of progress in improving international ocean governance**

The Commission and the European External Action Service published today a Joint report outlining the progress made on the ocean governance agenda since the adoption of a [Joint Communication on International Ocean Governance](#) two years ago. The 50 actions for safe, secure, clean and sustainably managed oceans in Europe and round the world are all successfully being implemented, while on a number of them the work will continue. High Representative/Vice President Federica **Mogherini** said: *“Our agenda on global ocean governance has triggered international cooperation across all continents and has reconfirmed our engagement to the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and in particular, Goal 14 dedicated to conserving and sustainably using our oceans, seas and marine resources. With a world population on the rise, pressures on the oceans are only going to increase. This necessitates shared international responsibility and partnerships, as no country can tackle these challenges alone.”* Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Karmenu **Vella** said: *“Oceans make up 70% of the planet and absorb 25% of the global CO2 emissions. I am happy that with our agenda for the future of our oceans, EU’s role in oceans’ management has strengthened and action has intensified. But the challenges that the oceans face are as big as the oceans themselves – climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, overfishing. We need to continue our work.”* The

report shows that €590 million have so far been engaged under EU development policy to promote better ocean governance with non-EU countries and over €500 million on marine research under the Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. The blue ocean economy offers significant opportunities for sustainable, innovative growth and decent jobs. On 19 March, the Commission is organising together with the European Parliament a [high-level conference on the future of oceans](#), where Commissioner **Vella** will have the opening keynote speech. The Joint report on international ocean governance accompanied by a Staff Working Document can be found [online](#). (For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel.: +32 229 56185; Aikaterini Apostola – Tel.: +32 229 87624)

### **Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Magneti Marelli by KKR**

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of Magneti Marelli S.p.A. of Italy, by KKR & Co., Ltd. (“KKR”) of the US. Magneti Marelli is a supplier of components and systems for the automotive sector, exhaust systems, aftermarket parts and services and motorsport products. KKR is an investment firm, which offers a broad range of asset funds and other investment products. KKR controls Calsonic Kansei Corporation, a Japan-based global supplier of auto parts, such as climate control systems, engine cooling products, automotive compressors, exhaust systems and electronic products. The Commission concluded that the proposed transaction would raise no competition concerns as the parties have a limited position in the markets where their activities overlap. 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.9200](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

### **Eurostat : Février 2019: Le taux d’inflation annuel en hausse à 1,5% dans la zone euro**

Le taux d’inflation annuel de la zone euro s’est établi à 1,5% en février 2019, contre 1,4% en janvier 2019. Un an auparavant, il était de 1,1%. Le taux d’inflation annuel de l’Union européenne s’est établi à 1,6% en février 2019, contre 1,5% en janvier 2019. Un an auparavant, il était de 1,4%. Ces chiffres sont publiés par Eurostat, l’office statistique de l’Union européenne. Les taux annuels les plus faibles ont été observés en Irlande (0,7%), en Grèce, en Croatie et à Chypre (0,8% chacun). Les taux annuels les plus élevés ont quant à eux été enregistrés en Roumanie (4,0%), en Hongrie (3,2%) et en Lettonie (2,8%). Par rapport à janvier 2019, l’inflation annuelle a baissé dans sept États membres, est restée stable dans un et a augmenté dans dix-neuf autres. Un communiqué de presse complet est disponible [ici](#). (Pour plus d’informations: Annika Breidhardt – Tél.: +32 229-56153; Enda McNamara – Tél.: +32 229 64976; Annikky Lamp – Tél.: +32 229 56151)

### **Eurostat: Dépenses des administrations publiques dans l’UE en 2017 : la part la plus élevée est consacrée à la protection sociale et à la santé**

En 2017, l’ensemble des dépenses publiques dans l’Union européenne (UE) représentait 45,8% du produit intérieur brut (PIB). Cette part a

régulièrement diminué depuis 2012, lorsqu'elle s'élevait à 48,9% du PIB. Parmi les dépenses des administrations publiques dans l'UE, la « protection sociale » est de loin la fonction la plus importante, équivalente à 18,8% du PIB en 2017. Viennent ensuite, par ordre d'importance, les fonctions « santé » (7,0%), « services généraux des administrations publiques » (5,8%) tels que les affaires étrangères et les opérations concernant la dette publique, « enseignement » (4,6%) et « affaires économiques » (4,0%). Les fonctions « ordre et sécurité publics » (1,7%), « défense » (1,3%), « loisirs, culture et culte » (1,1%), « protection de l'environnement » (0,8%) ainsi que « logements et équipements collectifs » (0,6%) ont un poids moins important. Ces informations sur les dépenses totales des administrations publiques par fonction proviennent d'une [publication](#) d'Eurostat, l'Office statistique de l'Union européenne. Un communiqué de presse complet est en [ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Annika Breidhardt – Tél.: +32 229-56153; Enda McNamara – Tél.: +32 229 64976; Annikky Lamp – Tél.: +32 229 56151)

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **Citizens' Dialogue with First Vice-President Timmermans in the Netherlands**

Today, Commission First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans** will take part in a Citizens' Dialogue on the topic of Circular economy and the Future of Europe in Emmen, the Netherlands. The event will take place NHL Stenden University of Applied Science between 14:30 and 15:30 CET. Some 150 people – students and entrepreneurs from the region – are expected to attend. The dialogue is taking place a day after First Vice-President **Timmermans** took part in a European Parliament plenary debate on the implementation and delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals. His intervention can be followed [here](#) and [here](#), a short video is available online [here](#). (For more information: Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 2 299 13 82; Andreana Stankova – Tel.: +32 229 57857)

### **Commissioner Hogan in Ireland to discuss the future Common Agricultural Policy and the role of women in agriculture in two Citizens' Dialogues**

Commissioner for Agriculture Phil **Hogan** is in Dublin today where he participates in two citizens' dialogues. The [first one](#), taking place earlier this morning, focused on the future Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the EU's place in global trade. He was joined on stage at this occasion by David Taylor, New Zealand Ambassador to the European Union. Together with European Parliament Vice-president Mairead McGuinness, Commissioner Hogan afterwards participates in a second [citizens' dialogue](#) reflecting on women farmers and female entrepreneurs in rural Ireland. Two other speakers complete the programme: Siobhán Lawless, Founder and CEO of Foods of Athenry and Norma Dinneen, Founder and CEO of Bó Rua Farm. This event will start at 12h local time. The number of women in farming has been slowly increasing in recent years. The [most recent data](#) suggests that, on average, around 30% of farms across the EU are managed by a woman. Not only does the EU support new farmers through its usual income support system, it can also provide rural



development funds to help young women get started in farming. More information is [online](#). (For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel.: +32 229 56 185; Clémence Robin – Tel.: +32 229 52509)

### **Commissioner Bieńkowska discusses worker mobility in the transport sector at Citizens' Dialogue in Krakow**

Today, Commissioner Elżbieta **Bieńkowska**, responsible for the Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs is hosting a Citizens' Dialogue in Krakow on the mobility of workers in the transport sector. The event will take place during the European Labour Mobility Congress, the biggest annual event in Europe dedicated to the posting of workers. Rules on posting of workers are particularly important in the transport and logistics sectors, where the workforce is by definition highly mobile. The Commission's priority is to ensure fair, clear and enforceable rules for mobile workers. During the event, the Commissioner will take stock of recent developments following the Commission's proposal on posted workers in the transport sector adopted under the 1<sup>st</sup> Mobility Package in May 2017. The discussion will be focused on possible solutions for enhancing the Single Market in service sector. (For more information: Lucía Caudet– Tel.: [+32 229 56282](#); Mirna Talko – Tél.: [+32 229 87278](#))

### **Vice-President Dombrovskis in Berlin for a European Semester visit**

Valdis **Dombrovskis**, Vice-President for the Euro and Social Dialogue, also in charge of Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, will be in Berlin for a European Semester visit on Monday 18 and Tuesday 19 March. He will meet Federal Minister of Finance, Olaf Scholz, and Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Energy, Peter Altmaier. He will also hold an exchange of views with the members of the Parliamentary Committees for Europe, Finances, Economy and Budget. On Tuesday the Vice-President will participate in the [Global Solutions Summit](#), where he will deliver a speech focusing on the international role of the euro. He will also meet the Summit's President, Dennis J. Snower, the Chairman of the German Trade Union Confederation, Rainer Hoffmann, and the President of the German Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Eric Schweitzer. (For more information: Annika Breidthardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153; Annikky Lamp– Tel.: +32 229 56151)

### **Commissioner Jourová participates in 2019 EU Roma week**

Next week, the EU Roma Week will take place in Brussels for the 4<sup>th</sup> time, under the patronage of Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, Vera **Jourová**, and will bring together policymakers, experts, activists and organisations fighting discrimination against Roma. Ahead of the week, Commissioner **Jourová** said: *"Building a vibrant Roma and pro-Roma civil society across the EU is a sign of healthy European democratic societies. The EU Framework for Roma integration is starting to bear its fruits and we are seeing an initial change in trends, but a lot of work remains to be done. Roma across the EU still face discriminations when having access to education, housing, health and employment. We must continue empowering civil society to keep momentum going."* On 19 March, the European Commission, together with the European Parliament, is organising a conference

on the evaluation of the [EU Framework for the National Roma Integration Strategies](#). The European Commission's [Roma Civil Monitor pilot project](#) will present the results of its monitoring of how Roma Integration Strategies are implemented across the EU. More than 90 Roma and pro-Roma civil society organisations have participated in research and reporting on Member States' Roma inclusion policies to account how these and the EU Framework are implemented in reality. Commissioner **Jourová** will also open the event "*Creating Trust through Uncovering and Recognising the Truth*" at the European Parliament, which will discuss how to advance recognition and remedies for Anti-Gypsyism. The Commissioner will also speak at the award ceremony of the European Civil Rights Prize of Sinti and Roma, which this year will be awarded to the Slovak President, Andrej Kiska, at the House of European History. More information can be found online on [EU Roma week](#) and the European Commission's work on [Roma integration in the EU](#). (For more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Mélanie Voin – Tel.: +32 229 5865)

[Calendar](#) – Commissioner's weekly activities

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

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## [European Commission calls on national political parties to join efforts to ensure free and fair elections in Europe](#)

In September 2018, as part of the State of the Union, President Juncker proposed [measures](#) to bolster European democracy and protect free and fair elections in Europe. Ahead of the European elections, Commissioner Vera **Jourová** has written to national political parties calling on them to ensure transparency of political advertising, to be ready to face cyberattacks and to respect European data protection rules during the campaign.

Frans **Timmermans**, First Vice-President said: "*We know there are forces which are trying to disrupt our societies, meddle in our elections and subvert our democracies. They will most likely step up their malicious activities in the run-up and during the European elections. We cannot be naïve. It's time we too step up our democratic defences as soon as possible so that people will be better informed, and their data better protected.*"

Věra **Jourová**, Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality said, "*Our elections and ultimately our democracies are challenged by new threats.*"

*Today, I call on all political parties to play their part in securing free and fair elections. Voters deserve transparency to make an informed choice. Online political advertising should be as transparent as the advertising you receive in your mailbox or on the market. Political parties also need to secure their networks to prevent cyberattacks and fully respect data protection rules. I expect all political actors to take their responsibility; at the same time the new sanctions introduced will also ensure the rules are respected."*

The [package of measures](#) adopted in September aims to bolster European democracy and protect free and fair elections in Europe. It includes a series of actions addressed to national and European political parties and foundations. Today, the Commission calls on national parties to ensure **transparency of the sources and amount of campaign funding for online activities** during the upcoming European Parliament election campaigns. To increase this transparency the Commission urges national political parties, foundations and campaign organisations to:

- ensure **citizens can easily recognise online paid political advertisements and communications**, and the party, foundation or organisation behind them;
- **make information available about their spending for online activities on their websites**. This includes paid online political advertisements and communications, as well as information on any targeting criteria used in the dissemination of such advertisements and communications;
- make their **paid online political advertisements** and communications accessible through their websites.

The Commission also reminds political parties and campaign organisations to implement appropriate measures to be able to tackle **cyberattacks** and recalls their obligations concerning the protection of personal data. Political parties that do not respect **data protection rules** to deliberately influence or attempt to influence the outcome of European elections will be subject to **new sanctions**, introduced by the amended [Regulation on the European political parties and foundations at the European level](#), which is expected to enter into force in April. Sanctions could amount to 5% of the annual budget of the European political party or foundation concerned. In addition, those found to be in breach would not be able to apply for funding from the general budget of the European Union in the year in which the sanction is imposed. These sanctions target infringements of rules on the protection of personal data being used by the European political parties or foundations to deliberately influence or attempt to influence the outcome of European elections. The European Commission calls on Member States to introduce similar sanctions at national level.

## **Next steps**

Following the European Parliament elections in May, the Commission will prepare a report, including on the implementation of the Elections' Recommendation, based amongst others on input from the political parties.



## Background

In September 2018, President **Juncker** presented the [Elections package](#) to better protect our democratic processes from manipulation by third countries or private interests. This came as a response to challenges posed by online campaigning and to threats observed in recent elections and referenda directed at discrediting and delegitimising elections in Europe. It includes a set of measures which aim to increase transparency in online campaign activities, assist stakeholders in the application of data protection rules in the electoral context, improve coordination between responsible national authorities and among Member States at the European level, and introduce the possibility to impose sanctions for the illegal use of personal data in order to deliberately influence the outcome of the European elections.

The [European Parliament welcomed the package in its Resolution](#) on the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica case adopted on 25 October 2018. The Council of national Ministers set out detailed expressions of support and commitments to action on the part of the Member States in its [Conclusions on securing free and fair European elections of 19 February 2019](#).

Responding to the Recommendation, Member States have established **national networks** to formalise cooperation among national authorities to jointly identify threats and gaps, share good practices, and exchange on how to apply electoral rules online . These national networks have met twice at a European level as the **election cooperation network**, assisted by the Commission, to share expertise and best practices among the Member States including on threats, gaps and enforcement, most recently on 27 February. The next meeting will take place on 4 April.

## For More Information

More information on the [electoral package](#) including the letter sent this morning

September 2018 [press release](#)

[Factsheet](#): Securing free and fair European elections