EU budget deal focuses on strengthening economy and responding to the refugee crisis

In the early hours of 17 November the EU institutions reached an agreement on the 2017 EU budget. As proposed by the Commission earlier this year, in 2017 the EU will spend more money on making Europe more competitive and more secure. Likewise, more money will go to support for the reception and integration of refugees and to address the root causes of migration in the countries of origin and transit. European Commission Vice-President Kristalina Georgieva, in charge of budget and human resources, said: "We have left no stone unturned to secure the money for a budget that will work in the best interest of our people. The 2017 EU budget will thus help buffer against shocks, providing a boost to our economy and helping to deal with issues like the refugee crisis. We continue to focus our budget on results, ensuring that every euro from the EU budget will make a difference." More information is available here.

Investment Plan for Europe: European Fund for Strategic Investments to trigger EUR 154 billion in new investments

Just under two years since the Juncker Commission announced the Investment Plan for Europe, investments expected to be triggered by the Plan now amount to EUR 154 billion, almost half the originally earmarked EUR 315 billion. The operations approved under the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) now represent a total financing volume of EUR 27.5 billion and are located in 27 Member States. These figures follow this week's meeting of the European Investment Bank (EIB) Board of Directors which approved 17 new projects to be financed under the EFSI at the recommendation of the EFSI's independent Investment Committee. The EIB has now approved 151 infrastructure projects for financing under the EFSI which represent a volume of financing of EUR 19.8 billion. The European Investment Fund (EIF) has approved 234 SME financing agreements, with total financing under the EFSI of EUR 7.7 billion. Close to 377,000 SMEs and Midcaps are expected to benefit. The list of EFSI projects is available here and project information by country and by sector will be available here. For all the latest Investment Plan announcements see here.

The November infringements' package: Commission acts for full, proper and timely implementation of EU law for the benefit of citizens and businesses

To help citizens and businesses benefit fully from the internal market, the European Commission continuously engages with and, if necessary, initiates infringement procedures against Member States which do not respect European law. The European Commission also closes pending cases where the Member State concerned, in cooperation with the Commission, has solved the problem and ensured compliance with EU law, thus rendering a referral to the Court of Justice of the EU unnecessary. This
month, as part of its monthly package of infringement decisions, the Commission took a number of decisions (including 3 letters of formal notice, 32 reasoned opinions, 8 referrals to the Court of Justice of the EU, and on 78 closures). A summary of the key decisions as well as the contact details of the relevant Spokespersons and the corresponding press releases can be found in the factsheet. On the general EU infringement procedure, a memo is also available here.

COP22: Sustainable electricity trade with Northern Africa

Today, in the presence of Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy, Miguel Arias Cañete, Germany, France, Spain, Portugal and Morocco have signed a roadmap for sustainable electricity trade. Signed in Marrakesh at the COP22 climate summit, the roadmap will serve to identify barriers to trade in renewable electricity between the five signatory countries and present ways to remove these barriers. Commissioner Arias Cañete said: "I am proud to witness the signature of an agreement which creates a path for integrating more renewable electricity in our electricity systems. Today, with the growth of renewable energy it increases the challenge of integrating electricity sources which are as variable as the weather into the electricity system. This can be achieved by linking electricity systems across borders and between the two banks of the Mediterranean Sea. Today's roadmap is a first concrete step in this direction."
Interconnecting electricity systems allows renewable electricity produced in one country to be used by a nearby country with lower production levels, smoothing out fluctuating supply and demand. More information about the roadmap for sustainable electricity trade on the Commission's website.

Promoting Media Pluralism and Democracy: Commission hosts second Annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights

Today and tomorrow, the European Commission hosts the second Annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights. Participants will discuss the topic of "Media Pluralism and Democracy". A Eurobarometer survey published today, 17 November, shows that European citizens are worried about the independence of the media; levels of trust in media are low, and citizens are concerned about the impact of online hate speech. Ahead of the ColloquiumFirst Vice-President Frans Timmermans stated:"Free and pluralistic media are the backbone of our democratic societies. Without quality media, public debate cannot flourish. That's why we need to ensure that journalists can do their jobs in full freedom." Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, Günther Oettinger added: "Quality and fact-based journalism are essential to our democracies. We need the right environment for media to do their work properly. We have recently proposed to strengthen the independence of media regulators as part of the new EU audiovisual rules. I count on the European Parliament and Member States to support this proposal." Prior to the ColloquiumCommissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, Věra Jourová also said:Citizens need to feel safe expressing themselves in the online environment and journalists must be able to go about their work free of interference. The Commission will look into the protection of journalists' sources and the whistleblowing rules in the EU." At the two day event the Vice-President and the Commissioners will lead discussions with high level representatives from the media, Member States, European institutions and international organisations, academia, and civil society, on how to safeguard and promote media freedom and pluralism in the EU. The Colloquium can be followed live online. Conclusions and proposed actions reflecting the discussions will be finalised and published on the Commission's Fundamental Rights website next week. Full press release, Colloquium Programme and Factsheet on 2016 Eurobarometer on media pluralism, are available online.

EU supports upgrade of Rydygier Hospital in Kujawsko-Pomorskie Region, Poland under the Investment Plan for Europe

The European Investment Bank (EIB) has signed a PLN 238 million (around EUR 57 million) agreement to finance the upgrading and extension of the Rydygier Hospital in the city of Torun, Poland. This is the first
EIB transaction in Poland's public sector to benefit from the support of the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), the financing component of the Investment Plan for Europe. Commissioner Elżbieta Bieńkowska, responsible for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, said: "The upgrading of the Rydygier Hospital is very good news for the residents of Toruń and the surrounding area. The Investment Plan for Europe is committed to financing projects in the health and social sectors, and today's signature is proof of that. I encourage other project promoters in Poland to contact the European Investment Bank to seek finance for their investment projects." For more information see here.

Commission hosts joint tax conference with IMF and publishes new report on the performance of EU Member States' tax systems

A new report published by the Commission today examines how the tax systems of Member States are performing against the twin taxation priorities of efficiency and fairness. Published to coincide with the joint European Commission-IMF conference on 'Taxation, Investment, and Innovation: a Triptych for Balanced Growth', this first survey of Tax Policies in the EU draws together information from different sources to examine how Member States' tax systems help to promote investment and employment, how they are working to reduce tax fraud, evasion and avoidance, and how tax systems help to address income inequalities and ensure social fairness. The report substantiates the priorities outlined in the Annual Growth Survey in the area of taxation and presents clearly and accessibly the most recent reforms undertaken by Member States. Reform options are also presented, alongside examples to help those Member States looking into ways to improve efficiency and fairness in their tax systems. An infographic provides a quick overview of the report's main findings and trends. Further information can be found in the full report here. Commissioner Pierre Moscovici will give the opening speech at the joint European Commission-IMF conference later today. The event begins at 14:30 CET today and will be livestreamed here.

EUROSTAT: Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure Scoreboard - A broad set of indicators for early detection of macroeconomic imbalances

Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, publishes today the indicators of the Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure (MIP) Scoreboard. The MIP is part of the Six-Pack regulation on economic governance adopted by the European Parliament and Council in November 2011. Full text available on EUROSTAT website

EUROSTAT: September 2016 compared with August 2016 - Production in construction down by 0.9% in euro area - Down by 0.3% in EU28

In September 2016 compared with August 2016, seasonally adjusted production in the construction sector decreased by 0.9% in the euro area (EA19) and by 0.3% in the EU28, according to first estimates from Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union. In August 2016, production in construction grew by 0.1% in the euro area and fell by 0.6% in the EU28. Full text available on EUROSTAT website

EUROSTAT: Annual inflation up to 0.5% in the euro area

Euro area annual inflation was 0.5% in October 2016, up from 0.4% in September. In October 2015 the rate was 0.1%. European Union annual inflation was 0.5% in October 2016, up from 0.4% in September. A year earlier the rate was 0.0%. These figures come from Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union.
October 2016, negative annual rates were observed in six Member States. The lowest annual rates were registered in Bulgaria and Cyprus (both -1.0%). The highest annual rates were recorded in Belgium (1.9%) and Austria (1.4%). Compared with September 2016, annual inflation fell in six Member States, remained stable in one and rose in twenty-one. The largest upward impacts to euro area annual inflation came from restaurants & cafés (+0.07 percentage points), rents and tobacco (both +0.04 pp), while gas (-0.12 pp), vegetables (-0.06 pp) and milk, cheese & eggs (-0.05 pp) had the biggest downward impacts. A Eurostat press release is available here.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

EU and Eastern Partnership countries stepping up cooperation on innovation with the EU4Innovation initiative

Commissioners Johannes Hahn and Carlos Moedas with Jean-Christophe Belliard, Deputy Secretary General of the European External Action Service launched today the EU4Innovation initiative together with the Eastern Partnership countries, in Yerevan, Armenia. The launch took place during the eighth Eastern Partnership Informal dialogue, hosted by Armenia which brought together Ministers and high level officials of the six Eastern Partnership countries - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine - for a high-level exchange on future developments in the Eastern Partnership and key areas of cooperation. The full press release is available online. The videos of the press conferences as well as photos of the visit will be available on EbS.

Commissioners Avramopoulos and King attend the Justice and Home Affairs Council

Commissioners Dimitris Avramopoulos and Julian King will attend the Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting in Brussels on 18 November 2016. Home Affairs Ministers will exchange views on the Commission proposal to establish a European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS) to strengthen security checks on visa-free travellers. Topics of discussion will also include progress made on enhancing information exchange and improving interoperability, the future of the Schengen Information System and measures taken in the fight against terrorism. Furthermore, Ministers will exchange views on the implementation of the EU Passenger Name Record (PNR) Directive and future steps for the EU Internet Forum.

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Find out here what will be discussed next week in the European Commission, the European Council and the European Parliament.