


 TODAY'S  
 News


 Wednesday, 20 May, 2015


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### EU proposes to scale up its partnership with ASEAN

The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European Commission have adopted the Joint Communication: "[The EU and ASEAN: a partnership with a strategic purpose](#)". The Joint Communication puts forward concrete ideas for taking EU-ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) relations to the next level by providing a more coherent framework for sectoral cooperation and by ensuring a sharper political focus. *"The partnership between the EU and ASEAN is crucial and we are determined to build on it and strengthen our political and economic cooperation. From trade to security, from climate change to the rule of law, we have a deep cooperation and as the EU we are supporting ASEAN integration. Deepening and broadening our relation with ASEAN is key for the EU's Asia strategy,"* said High Representative / Vice-President **Federica Mogherini**. A press release is available [here](#).

### Transport: Commission launches infringement case on the application of the German Minimum Wage law to the transport sector

The European Commission decided yesterday to launch an infringement procedure against Germany, concerning the application of the Minimum Wage Act to the transport sector. Following an exchange of information with the German authorities and a thorough legal assessment of the German measures, the Commission sent a Letter of Formal Notice to Germany. Whilst fully supporting the introduction of a minimum wage in Germany, the Commission considers that the application of the Minimum Wage Act to all transport operations which touch German territory restricts the freedom to provide services and the free movement of goods in a disproportionate manner. The German authorities now have two months to respond to the arguments put forward by the Commission, in the letter of formal notice. The press release is available [here](#).

### State of Nature: Largest ever assessment draws a mixed picture for Europe's habitats and species

Today the Commission adopted a new report providing the most comprehensive picture yet on the '[State of Nature in the EU](#)'. The findings show that the majority of birds have a secure status, and some species and habitats are doing better. Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Karmenu **Vella**, said: *"This report is significant and timely. While it shows a mixed picture overall, it clearly demonstrates*

*that efforts to improve vulnerable ecosystems can be highly effective. It also shows the scale of the challenges that remain. We have to rise to those challenges, as the health of Europe's people, and also our economy, is linked to the health of our nature.”* The findings of the report will feed into the ongoing [Fitness Check of the Birds and Habitat Directives](#), which is part of a broader exercise taking stock of EU legislation to ensure that it is fit for purpose. A press release is available [here](#)

## **EU Bathing Water Quality report: Europeans continue enjoying high-quality waters**

The Commission and the European Environment Agency published today the [annual bathing water quality report](#), which compares the quality of bathing water sampled at more than 21 000 coastal and inland bathing sites across the EU in 2014. All the bathing sites in Cyprus, Luxembourg, and Malta had excellent water quality. These countries were followed by Greece (97%), Croatia (94%) and Germany (90%), all having a high proportion of sites with excellent bathing water quality. Across Europe, just under 2% of bathing sites failed to meet the [Bathing Water Directive](#)'s minimum standards for water quality and were rated 'poor'. An [interactive map](#) showing the performance of each bathing site is available as well as a [press release](#) by EEA and a [video message](#) by Commissioner **Vella** announcing the report from his home town in Malta.

## **Reports explore potential impact of new origin labelling for certain foods**

Today, the Commission publishes two reports on origin labelling, as requested by the Council and European Parliament in the [Food Information for Consumers Regulation \(1169/2011\)](#). Both conclude that the benefits from new mandatory labelling requirements do not clearly outweigh the costs and that voluntary labelling rules seem to be the most suitable solution. The [first report](#) looks at the feasibility of different options for mandatory origin labelling for **dairy products and for minor meats**, notably horsemeat, rabbit meat and meat from game and birds (farmed and wild), given that labelling rules are already in place for beefmeat, pigmeat, poultrymeat, sheepmeat and goatmeat. Considering consumer attitudes towards additional information and potential extra costs, as well as any technical and administrative requirements arising for businesses and public authorities, the report concludes that for dairy products there would be an uneven impact on producers, making it more burdensome for some than for others. It also seems that consumers are not willing to pay more for the additional information. The report therefore suggests that the existing options for voluntary labelling could address some consumer demands while retaining flexibility for Member States and food operators. For the "minor meats", the report similarly concludes that compulsory origin labelling would imply operational costs which would not outweigh the benefits. The [second report](#) explores the need for consumers to be informed on the origin of unprocessed foods, single ingredient products and ingredients that represent more than 50 % of a food. It concludes that consumers are interested in origin labelling for all these food categories, but less so for food categories such as meat, meat products and dairy products. The report also looks at the costs and benefits of labelling rules, including the impact on the internal market and on international trade, and concludes that voluntary origin labelling, combined with existing mandatory origin labelling regimes for specific foods or categories of food, is the most suitable way forward. These reports will be transmitted to the European Parliament and the Council.

## **Proposal for a framework agreement between the EU and Armenia**

The Commission on 19 May adopted a recommendation for the Council to authorise the opening of negotiations on a Framework Agreement between the European Union and Armenia. Following Armenia's decision to join the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) rather than pursue with signature of the Association Agreement with the EU, both sides reconfirmed in November 2013 their commitment to further develop and strengthen cooperation in all areas of mutual interest within the Eastern Partnership framework. Last year the EU and Armenia launched a reflection exercise on the scope of a future renewed agreement of cooperation, clarifying the areas that are compatible with Armenia's new commitments under the EEU. The Recommendation is for a Council Decision authorising the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica **Mogherini** to open negotiations on a Framework Agreement. It will be presented to Member States for their final adoption.

## **EUROSTAT: Production in construction up by 0.8% in euro area**

In March 2015 compared with February 2015, seasonally adjusted production in the construction sector rose by 0.8% in the euro area (EA19) and by 1.5% in the EU28, according to first estimates from Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union. In February 2015, production in construction dropped by 1.6% and 0.8% respectively. In March 2015 compared with March 2014, production in construction fell by 2.7% in the euro area and by 1.3% in the EU28. The Eurostat press release can be found [here](#).

## **EUROSTAT: Facts and figures about the Eastern Partners of the European Union**

The Eastern Partnership was launched in 2009, as a joint initiative between the European Union (EU) and six Eastern European and South Caucasus partner countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. On the occasion of the 4<sup>th</sup> Eastern Partnership summit, which will take place on 21 and 22 May in Riga, Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, issues some selected data on demography, economy and trade in goods for the EU, its Member States and the Eastern Partners. A selection of [infographics](#) is also available on the Eurostat website. The Eurostat press release can be found [here](#).

## **STATEMENTS**

### **Statement by the Commission following the EIB's decision of the next projects to be pre-financed as part of the Investment Plan for Europe**

Yesterday the [European Investment Bank \(EIB\)](#) announced that it has approved financing for four investment projects as part of the [Investment Plan for Europe](#), in which it is the Commission's strategic partner. These projects are in energy efficiency investment to reduce heating bills of private homes in France; new renewable energy and related transmission links in links in northern and western Europe; reduction of industrial energy use in Finland; and improvement to gas transmission in Spain. Yesterday's decision follows the [EIB's announcement](#) on 22 April of the first projects to receive pre-financing, and it is in line with the [European Council conclusions](#) of December 2014 which invited the EIB Group to "*start activities by using its own funds as of January 2015*". The European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), which is at the heart of the Investment Plan, should be up and running by September 2015, pending the successful conclusion of negotiations between the co-legislators. This EIB pre-financing is without prejudice to being eligible for EFSI-financing, the exact criteria for which are still being negotiated by the co-legislators. For more information on the EIB's announcement including quotes from Vice-President **Katainen**, Vice-President **Šefčovič** and Commissioner **Cañete**, please see the full [Commission statement](#).

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **Vice-President Šefčovič starts Energy Union Tour in the Netherlands today**

European Commission Vice-President Maroš **Šefčovič** in charge of Energy Union travels Wednesday, 20 May to the Netherlands as part of the Energy Union Tour, presented last Monday in his [press statement](#). The Vice-President will meet with Prime Minister Mark Rutte and Minister of Economic Affairs Henk Kamp. During his Tour in the Netherlands, the Vice-President will also make a field visit to the production facility of the company Interface to discuss renewable energy efficiency. Vice-President **Šefčovič** will also represent the European Union at the Energy Charter Ministerial Conference, jointly organized by the Netherlands and the Energy Charter Secretariat. Vice-President **Šefčovič** said: "*Energy Union cannot and shouldn't be imposed from Brussels. I am bringing the discussions to the Netherlands to get their first hand reaction and opinion on all five dimensions of the Energy union. The Tour is good moment to share our findings with the Dutch government, stakeholders, business partners and citizens*". The Energy Union Tour will feed into the first State of the Energy Union report, which the Commission will present to the European Parliament and

Council later this year and which should become an important tool to monitor progress at the European, national and regional level.

### **Commissioner Crețu on her first visit to Greece**

[From 20 to 23 May](#), Commissioner for Regional Policy Corina **Crețu** is in Greece to exchange with Greek stakeholders in charge of the management of EU funds and to visit EU-funded projects. In particular, today she met with Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras. Her four-day trip includes the visit of Athens and of the regions of Western Greece, Epirus, Thessaly and Continental Greece. *"Cohesion Policy has two important roles to play in Greece. Our funds will help address the most pressing needs of the Greek population, in terms of social inclusion, fight against unemployment and necessary infrastructures. But we are mostly here to help pave the way for the future, with strategic and result-oriented investments in the regions' most competitive fields, identified in the [Smart Specialisation Strategies](#). We are ready to support the Greek authorities to direct investments where they are most needed,"* the Commissioner said, ahead of her visit. Greece will benefit from 20.6 billion euro from the [European Structural and Investment Funds](#) throughout 2014-2020, among which 15.5 billion euro from [Cohesion Policy](#) funds. More information on [Greece and Cohesion Policy](#) is available online.

### **Commissioner Mimica reinforces EU's commitment towards sustainable energy**

EU Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven **Mimica**, will today launch ElectriFI, a financing mechanism for rural electrification projects to reduce energy poverty and ensure viable access to affordable energy services, in the context of the Sustainable Energy for All Forum on 18-21 May, in New York. Two Joint Declarations to work closer with Sierra Leone and Uganda, Germany and France, in the field of energy, will also be signed by the Commissioner. Commissioner **Mimica** said: *"The EU joined the UN Secretary General's initiative to provide Sustainable Energy for All by 2030 right from the start. Fulfilling this promise will require strong cooperation and the political will of our partner countries. Our ElectriFI initiative will, in combination with other financing resources offered by the EU, help ensure that access to affordable energy services will be possible for poor households in rural areas. The joint declarations to be signed this week with Uganda and Sierra Leone will confirm our political determination to work closer in partnership and will set out a concrete roadmap of action to fight energy poverty"*. Further information is available [here](#).

### **Commissioners Bulc and Oettinger discuss smart cities and communities in Berlin**

Tomorrow Violeta **Bulc**, EU Commissioner for Transport, and Gunter H. **Oettinger**, EU Commissioner for the Digital Economy and Society will be in Berlin at the Metropolitan Solutions Fair, where they will speak at the [General Assembly](#) of the [European Innovation Partnership on Smart Cities and Communities \(EIP-SCC\)](#). This annual meeting brings together cities, industry and citizens to help improve urban life through sustainable, replicable, integrated innovative solutions, focussing on linking Energy, ICT and Transport. Discussions will be centred on smart cities business opportunities in Europe, as well as new ways of increasing synergies between policies and funds to promote citizen-engagement and city-needs driven market-building. Smart cities play a key role in the new Energy Union strategy, in which active consumers, renewable energy and energy efficiency are central to the energy transition. By supporting the EIP-SCC, the European Commission endorses developments in applied innovation, planning, and higher energy efficiency that help develop integrated solutions for intelligent cities. More information available on the event [website](#). Event hashtag: #EUSmartCitiesGA

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Find out [here](#) what will be discussed next week in the European Commission, European Council and the European Parliament.

