



Tuesday, 08 December, 2015

### **EUROSTAT: GDP up by 0.3% in euro area and by 0.4% in EU28**

Seasonally adjusted GDP rose by 0.3% in the euro area (EA19) and by 0.4% in the EU28 during the third quarter of 2015, compared with the previous quarter, according to a second estimate published by Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union. In the second quarter of 2015, GDP grew by 0.4% and 0.5% respectively. A Eurostat press release is available [here](#).

### **Alcohol: Commission shares Member States concerns on alcohol related harm**

The European Commissioner for health and food safety, Vytenis **Andriukaitis** declared: *"I fully share the concerns of the Council about alcohol-related harm. Alcohol misuse is a very serious matter which has devastating consequences for the affected individuals, their families and for society."* The Commissioner added: *"I am particularly concerned with preventing the harmful use of alcohol, and not just addressing its consequences; and I certainly share Health Ministers' concern about the need to protect young people. I am committed to continue supporting Member States in preventing and addressing alcohol misuse."* The Commission shares the view expressed in the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) Conclusions on Monday 7 December, namely that the principal responsibility to tackle alcohol rests with Member States. To support Member States' efforts in this regard, the Commission is already taking forward actions in the areas covered by the Conclusions. The Commission is keen to continue to support Member States in preventing and addressing alcohol misuse, by collecting and disseminating solid data, by fostering the sharing of best practices, and by funding joint actions and projects. Looking at the near future, the Commission will be financing a €1.7 million project, due to start soon, on best practices to reduce accessibility to alcohol, in particular for young people. The Commission welcomes Member States' call to strengthen the multi-stakeholder and multi-sectorial approach, to base policy on effective measures and best practices and to ensure solid and reliable information. In addition, the Commission is supporting a Joint Action on alcohol related harm and is helping the Member States implement the Action Plan on Youth drinking and Heavy Episodic Drinking. Both of these come to an end next year and its results will be assessed when considering possible new initiatives. The Commission is also strengthening its capacity to generate both country-specific and cross-country information on a range of issues including alcohol so as to better support Member States in their action. On the labelling of alcoholic beverages, the Commission intends to come forward with a report as required by the food information legislation. The Commission is committed to continuing the work on all the actions in all the areas identified, in close cooperation with the Member States.

## **EU announces more than €100 million for Ukraine to support decentralisation reform and re-enforcement of local governance**

In the margins of the EU-Ukraine Association Council of 7 December, the European Commission adopted a major set of measures to support decentralisation reform and re-enforcement of local governance in Ukraine. A €97 million programme jointly funded by the EU (€90 million), Germany (€6 million) and Poland (€1 million) will strengthen governance and accountability at local, regional and central levels to better respond to the needs of the population. €10 million of additional support funded by the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace will be allocated for the restoration of governance, reconciliation and peacebuilding in the eastern part of Ukraine, most affected by war and displacement. The full press release is available [here](#). The press remarks following the EU-Ukraine Association Council are online: see [remarks](#) by High Representative / Vice-President Federica **Mogherini**; [remarks](#) by Commissioner Johannes **Hahn**. The "Quick Guide to the Association Agreement" is available [here](#).

## **EU and the Republic of San Marino sign new tax transparency agreement**

The EU and San Marino are due to sign a landmark tax transparency agreement later today (15:30), constituting an important step forward in the fight against tax evasion. The new agreement marks the end of bank secrecy between San Marino and the EU. As of 2017, San Marino and EU Member States will automatically exchange information on the financial accounts of one another's residents. Under this deal, Member States will receive the names, addresses, tax identification numbers and dates of birth of their residents with accounts in San Marino, as well as other financial and account balance information. The same will be valid for San Marino in relation to the accounts held by its residents within any of the EU Member States. This procedure is in line with the new OECD/G20 global standard for the automatic exchange of information. A press release will be available online following the signature.

## **Antitrust: Commission opens formal investigation in the biofuels sector concerning ethanol benchmarks**

The European Commission has opened a formal antitrust investigation to scrutinise whether three ethanol producers have, in breach of EU antitrust rules, manipulated ethanol benchmarks published by a price reporting agency. The companies concerned are Abengoa S.A. of Spain, Alcogroup SA of Belgium and Lantmännen ek för of Sweden, together with their relevant subsidiaries. They produce, distribute and trade ethanol. Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, stated: "*Competitive biofuels markets are crucial to promote cleaner transport and to cut greenhouse gas emissions. This is an important element of the Commission's ambitious strategy to limit greenhouse gas emissions and to boost renewable energies.*" The Commission's investigation started with unannounced inspections carried out in [May 2013](#). Further inspections were carried out in [October 2014](#) and [March 2015](#). A full press release is available in [here](#). More information on the investigation will be available on the Commission's competition website, in the public [case register](#) under the case number AT.40054.

## **Antitrust: Commission sends two Statements of Objections on exclusivity payments and predatory pricing to Qualcomm**

The Commission has informed Qualcomm of its preliminary conclusions that the chipset company illegally paid a customer for exclusively using Qualcomm chipsets and sold chipsets below cost with the aim of forcing its competitor Icera out of the market, in potential breach of EU antitrust rules. EU Commissioner in charge of competition policy Margrethe **Vestager** said: "*Many consumers enjoy high-speed internet on smartphones and other devices – baseband chipsets are key components that make this happen. I am*

*concerned that Qualcomm's actions have pushed out competitors or prevented them from competing. We need to make sure that European consumers continue to benefit from competition and innovation in an area which is at the heart of today's economy."* In [July 2015](#), the Commission opened two formal antitrust investigations to assess concerns that Qualcomm may have abused a dominant position in the area of baseband chipsets through two separate conducts, namely by incurring in exclusive payments and by engaging in predatory pricing. A full press release is available here in [here](#). More information on this case will be available under the case numbers 39711 and 40220 in the public case register on the Commission's competition website.

## **Commission welcomes agreement to make EU online environment more secure**

Negotiators of the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission last night agreed on the first EU-wide legislation on cybersecurity. The [Directive on Network and Information Security](#) will: improve cybersecurity capabilities in Member States; improve Member States' cooperation on cybersecurity; require operators of essential services in the energy, transport, banking and healthcare sectors, and providers of key digital services like search engines and cloud computing, to take appropriate security measures and report incidents to the national authorities. Andrus **Ansip**, Commission Vice-President for the [Digital Single Market](#), welcomed the agreement: *"Trust and security are the very foundations of a Digital Single Market. If we want people and businesses to use and make the most of connected digital services, they need to trust them to be secure in the case of attack or failure. The internet knows no border – a problem in one country can have a knock-on effect in the rest of Europe. This is why we need EU-wide cybersecurity solutions. Last night's agreement is an important step in this direction, but we cannot stop here: we plan an ambitious partnership with the industry in the coming months to develop more secure products and services."* Günther H. **Oettinger**, Commissioner for the Digital Economy and Society, said: *"Congratulations to the Parliament's negotiation team and to the Luxembourgish Presidency of the Council. The agreement constitutes a major step in improving the resilience of our network and information systems in Europe, one of the objectives of the EU cybersecurity strategy and a cornerstone of our efforts towards creating a Digital Single Market. Improving cooperation and information exchange between Member States is a key element of the agreed rules and will help us tackle the increasing number of cyber-attacks. Cybersecurity is essential in today's European digital economy and society – and it remains a permanent challenge."* A press release is available [here](#).

## **Mergers: Commission clears joint venture between EGP and F2i in renewable energy sector**

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of joint control over a newly created joint venture by Enel Green Power S.p.A. ("EGP"), part of the Enel group, and F2i SGR S.p.A. (F2i), all of Italy. EGP develops and operates renewable energy power plants. F2i manages two closed investment funds both investing in infrastructures in Italy. The two companies will contribute their respective photovoltaic power plants in Italy into the joint venture. The Commission concluded that the proposed transaction would raise no competition concerns, because it will not significantly alter the structure of the market where the EGP, F2i and the joint venture will compete. Moreover, the companies will continue to face competition from a number of existing players. The transaction was examined under the normal merger review procedure. More information is available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the public [case register](#) under the case number [M.7816](#).

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **Commissioner Mimica to participate in ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly**

From 6 to 8 December, 78 elected representatives of the African, Caribbean and Pacific States (ACP countries) and 78 Members of the European Parliament are gathering together in Brussels on the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> edition of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA). Today, 8 December, Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven **Mimica**, will take part in the plenary session and will deliver a speech, as well as participate in a Q&A session. Topics including the future of the partnership between the EU and the ACP Group of States, migration and refugees, the new Sustainable Development Agenda, and climate change are expected to dominate the debate. Discussions will also cover the provision of healthcare, infrastructure and financing in ACP countries. The full agenda of the Parliamentary Assembly is available [here](#) and more detail about the EU's work with ACP countries is available [here](#).

## European Day for People with Disabilities: Milan wins 2016 Access City Award

On the occasion of the European Day for People with Disabilities, the European Commission is pleased to announce that Milan (Italy) is the winner of the [2016 Access City Award](#). Wiesbaden (Germany), Toulouse (France), Vaasa (Finland) and Kaposvár (Hungary) were also awarded for their efforts to improve accessibility for people with disabilities and the elderly. The award ceremony took place this morning in the context of the [European Day of Persons with Disabilities 2015 conference](#), which started yesterday in Brussels and lasts until tonight. This year, the focus of the conference is on children and young people with disabilities. Under the title "Growing together in a barrier-free Europe", the event includes presentations and discussions about inclusive education which represents an important way to ensure the equal participation of persons with disabilities in work and society. The aim of the conference is to exchange good practices of inclusive education and promote active participation in society as well as on the labour market, at national as well as EU level. Marianne **Thyssen**, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, said: *"This European Commission sees accessibility as a major catalyst for social inclusion. Just last week, we adopted the European Accessibility Act. It aims to establish EU-wide requirements for accessible products and services. I warmly congratulate all the cities who participated in the Award this year: you are contributing to make our Europe more accessible for all. You serve as an inspiration to cities across the continent as you lead us on our way to a barrier-free Europe."* For more information on the Access City Award, see [here](#). The Commission's proposal for a European Accessibility Act can be found [here](#).

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

