



Tuesday, 19 January, 2016

Latest Common Agricultural Policy simplification proposals to introduce a fairer and more transparent penalty system

In line with the ongoing efforts to simplify the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Commissioner **Hogan** presented on Monday evening his latest proposals to the members of the Agriculture and Rural Development committee of the European Parliament, in Strasbourg. The focus of the newly announced simplification package is on the penalty system to take into account reasonable concerns by farmers in case of unintentional mistakes while also reducing the frequency of errors and therefore protecting public funds. Three complementary elements will result in a more proportionate and transparent penalty system: preliminary checks of aid applications, simplification of the system of administrative penalties, and last but not least a "yellow card" system for first offenders with reduced penalties. Addressing the members of the EP committee, Commissioner **Hogan** said: *"These simplification measures should have a direct effect on farmers, sending a clear message that our interest is not to catch farmers out as it were, but ensure that public money is well spent. Farmers, I know, fully support that goal. I believe that the preventive preliminary checks, the yellow card and the simplified penalty system should make the lives of farmers easier, and even more importantly, they should reduce significantly the number of error and consequently of cases where administrative penalties would need to be applied. These proposed changes should end the climate of fear for farmers, and are a fair and proportionate response to the concerns of smaller farmers in particular."* More information on the proposals and the previous simplification measures already implemented is available [online](#).

College to discuss proposal to facilitate the exchange of criminal records of non-EU citizens through European Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS)

Today, the College will discuss a key action announced in the [Agenda for Security](#). The [European Criminal Records Information System \(ECRIS\)](#) will be upgraded to facilitate the exchange of criminal records of non-EU citizens. This system was established in 2012 and enables national judicial authorities to receive information on previous criminal convictions in other Member States either for court proceedings or criminal investigations. This allows for a rapid and efficient exchange of information between national authorities, contributing to improving the prevention and fight against cross-border crime and terrorism. Member States currently send through ECRIS around 288,000 requests per year on previous criminal convictions across the EU. ECRIS should be used at its full potential to better respond to growing terrorist threats that need improved cross-border cooperation to ensure the security of citizens. A press conference will take place at 15:30 in the European Parliament's Press conference room in Strasbourg at 15:30 or followed live [here](#).

Investment Plan for Europe: over €50 million for SMEs in Czech Republic

The European Investment Fund (EIF) and Komerční banka have signed a [COSME](#) agreement in the Czech Republic, benefiting from the support of the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) the heart of the [Investment Plan for Europe](#). The COSME agreement - together with an [EaSI](#) agreement signed today - will allow Komerční banka to support over €50 million of loans to more than 2,300 SMEs and microbusinesses in the Czech Republic over the next three years. European Commissioner Elżbieta **Bieńkowska**, responsible for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, said: *"With the agreements being signed today by Komerční banka and the EIF more than 2,300 very small businesses and SMEs in the Czech Republic will be able to access funding through new loans. With the Investment Plan we are supporting the backbone of our economy and I look forward to many more SME financing agreements across Europe throughout 2016."* For more information see [here](#)

Energy: EU invests €217 million in energy infrastructure

Today, Member States agreed on a Commission proposal to invest €217 million in key trans-European energy infrastructure projects, mainly in Central and South Eastern Europe. In total, 15 projects were selected following a call for proposals under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), an EU funding programme for infrastructure. The selected projects will increase energy security and help end the isolation of Member States from EU-wide energy networks. They will also contribute to the completion of a European energy market and the integration of renewables into the electricity grid. The European Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy Miguel Arias **Cañete** said: *"Today, we are targeting those regions in Europe which need it the most. With this funding we will help secure supplies and fully integrate Europe's energy market by connecting networks across Europe. We must press ahead with the modernisation of our energy networks to bring any country still isolated into the European energy market. Modern energy networks are also crucial to ensuring efficient use of our energy resources and therefore key to reaching our climate goals."* Of the 15 proposals selected for funding, nine are in the gas sector (financial aid worth €207 million) and six in electricity sector (€10 million). Increasing the number of strategic energy interconnectors in Europe is central to reaching the Energy Union's target of diversifying energy sources and reducing the high energy dependency of several Member States. Energy Union and climate change policy are one of the main political priorities of Juncker Commission. For more information see [press release IP/16/94](#) and the [Energy Union's central page](#).

State aid: Commission approves public service aid to Sundsvall Timra and Skelleftea airports in Sweden

The European Commission has found Swedish plans to grant compensation for public service obligations linked to the management of two regional airports to be in line with EU state aid rules. The public funding will contribute to facilitate regional connectivity and development without unduly distorting competition in the Single Market. Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, stated: *"Sundsvall Timra and Skelleftea airports operate in Västernorrland and Västernorrland, two sparsely populated areas of Sweden. The Commission found that the compensation they receive is necessary to connect citizens and businesses from these two areas with the rest of Sweden and the EU."* The Commission's investigation found that the lack of acceptable connections between Västernorrland County and Västernorrland County with Stockholm and the rest of Europe would significantly harm the standard of living of inhabitants of these areas and would significantly reduce the regions' activities and business outlook. This would seriously hamper the social and economic development of these areas. In line with the Aviation Guidelines, the Commission also ensured that the compensation cannot be used to subsidise any airline aiming at developing commercial air transport services. A full press release is available in [here](#)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Axa Portugal by ageas

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of Axa Portugal, the business of the Axa insurance group in Portugal, by ageas SA/NV of Belgium. Axa Portugal provides insurance services to customers in Portugal. Ageas is a global insurance group. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, given the companies' limited combined market share resulting from the transaction and the presence of strong competitors. The case was assessed 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.7855](#).

EUROSTAT: Annual inflation up to 0.2% in the euro area

Euro area annual inflation was 0.2% in December 2015, up from 0.1% in November. In December 2014 the rate was -0.2%. European Union annual inflation was 0.2% in December 2015, up from 0.1% in November. A year earlier the rate was -0.1%. These figures come from Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union. A Eurostat press release is available [here](#).

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

In November 2015 compared with October 2015, seasonally adjusted production in the construction sector increased by 0.8% in the euro area (EA19) and by 0.7% in the EU28, according to first estimates from Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union. In October 2015, production in construction grew by 0.6% in the euro area and by 0.2% in the EU28. A Eurostat press release is available [here](#).

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