



Wednesday, 20 January, 2016

### **Commission appoints Director in the Structural Reform Support Service**

The European Commission has appointed Ms Mary R. McCarthy to the position of Director in the Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS). Ms McCarthy, an Irish national, joined the European Commission in 1991, in the Directorate General for Economic and Financial Affairs, where she spent most of her career. Ms McCarthy first became Head of Unit in April 1999 and moved to the position of an Economic Adviser in 2005. Between July 2013 and March 2015, she was Head of the Support Group for Cyprus. She first became Director in April 2015 and has been Acting Director in the Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) since October 2015. Ms McCarthy holds a Ph.D. in Economics from New York University.

### **First estimate for November 2015 - EU28 current account surplus €12.3 bn - €13.8 bn surplus for trade in services**

The **EU28** seasonally adjusted external current account recorded a surplus of €12.3 billion in November 2015, compared with a surplus of €13.2 bn in October 2015 and a surplus of €16.2 bn in November 2014, according to estimates from **Eurostat** [here](#).

### **State aid: Commission orders Belgium to recover €211 million from several steel companies within the Duferco group**

The Commission has concluded that €211 million funding granted by the Walloon authorities in Belgium to several steel companies within the Duferco group between 2006 and 2011 distorted competition in breach of EU state aid rules. Following an [in-depth investigation](#), the Commission concluded that no private investor would have accepted to invest at the same terms as the Belgian Foreign Strategic Investments Holding (FSIH), a public authority controlled by the Walloon Government in Belgium. The public funding therefore provides a selective advantage to its recipients that their competitors who have to operate without such subsidised funding did not have. Margrethe **Vestager**, Commissioner in charge of competition policy, said: *"Steelmakers across the EU are struggling with worldwide overcapacity and strong imports – the response to this challenge must be to improve the sector's long-term global competitiveness. Therefore, EU state aid rules enable Member States to for example support research activities or relieve energy costs of steel companies, and the Commission tackles international trade distortions using anti-dumping or anti-subsidy measures. It is also why EU countries and the Commission have put in place strict safeguards against state aid to rescue and restructure steel companies in difficulty. This avoids harmful subsidy races between EU countries and that uncontrolled state aid in one EU country can unfairly put at risk thousands of jobs across the EU. Despite the illegal state aid to Duferco the company has now withdrawn almost all*

*business activities from Belgium. The case shows that state aid to artificially keep steel manufacturers afloat that are not viable seriously distorts competition and only delays their exit from the market at the cost of taxpayers." The full press release is available online in [here](#)*

### **State aid: Commission opens in-depth investigation into Italian support for steel producer Ilva in Taranto, Italy**

The European Commission has opened an in-depth inquiry to assess whether Italian state support for steel producer Ilva was in line with EU State aid rules. In particular, the Commission will examine whether measures facilitating Ilva's access to finance for modernising its plant in Taranto give the company an unfair advantage not available to its competitors. Given the urgent need to tackle pollution at the Ilva premises in Taranto, the Commission decision also provides safeguards that allow Italy to proceed immediately with clean-up measures. The opening of an in-depth investigation gives interested third parties the opportunity to submit comments on the measures under assessment. It does not prejudge the outcome of the investigation. Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, stated: *"Steelmakers across the EU are struggling with worldwide overcapacity and strong imports – the response to this challenge must be to improve the sector's long-term global competitiveness. Therefore, EU state aid rules enable Member States to for example support research activities or relieve energy costs of steel companies, and the Commission tackles international trade distortions using anti-dumping or anti-subsidy measures. It is also why EU countries and the Commission have put in place strict safeguards against state aid to rescue and restructure steel companies in difficulty. This avoids harmful subsidy races between EU countries and that uncontrolled state aid in one EU country can unfairly put at risk thousands of jobs across the EU. In the case of Ilva, the Commission will now assess whether Italian support measures are in line with EU state aid rules. We will work with Italy to address our current concerns. The best guarantee for a sustainable future of steel production in the Taranto region is the sale of Ilva's assets to a buyer that upgrades them in line with environmental standards and runs them for productive use. Today's decision also gives clarity to Italy that it can support the clean-up of the serious pollution problems at the Taranto site, as long as the money is subsequently recovered from the polluter."* The full press release is available online in [here](#)

### **EU announces €29 million in humanitarian aid for Somalia**

Today the European Commission has announced €29 million, for 2016, in humanitarian support for the most vulnerable populations in Somalia. The new funding comes as nearly five million people are in need of humanitarian assistance and over one million people remain displaced inside the country. Announcing the funds in the Somalian capital Mogadishu during a visit to the country, EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, Christos **Stylianides** said: *"The EU will continue to ensure that humanitarian aid reaches the most vulnerable populations in Somalia. Despite the challenging security conditions for humanitarian workers to deliver aid, we cannot overlook long lasting and complex crises like that of Somalia. Today I have met with key humanitarian partners, beneficiaries and authorities. Our humanitarian aid remains most needed, yet a conducive political environment is the only solution that can end the humanitarian crisis."* The funding will help provide support in the areas of food, health services, water, sanitation and hygiene, shelter, protection and education in emergencies. Read the full press release [here](#). Audiovisual material will be made available on [EbS](#).

### **Mergers: Commission approves acquisition of Navitaire by Amadeus**

The Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of airline software provider Navitaire by rival Amadeus. The Commission concluded the companies' IT solutions target different types of airlines and are complementary. Navitaire and Amadeus are active worldwide in the provision of Passenger Service Systems ("PSS"), an IT tool used by airlines to internally manage reservations, inventory and departure control. The Commission's investigation focused on actual and potential competition for PSS

and whether Amadeus could use its position in the Global Distribution System market ("GDS", a different IT tool used by travel agencies to obtain information and make bookings with airlines) to disadvantage rivals or hinder innovation in the PSS market. After its investigation, the Commission concluded that the transaction would raise no competition concerns. A full press release is available in [EN](#), [FR](#), [DE](#) and [ES](#). More information is available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the public [case register](#) under the case number [M.7802](#).

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### **Aviation Summit: Commissioner Bulc kick starts work on Aviation Strategy in Schiphol**

Today and tomorrow EU Commissioner for Transport Violeta **Bulc** will be in the Netherlands where she will appear in front of the Dutch Parliament and participate in the Aviation Summit co-organised with the Dutch Presidency. Held in Amsterdam, the Aviation Summit will bring together stakeholders, transport ministers and MEPs for the first high-level discussion on the [Aviation Strategy](#), which the Commission adopted in December 2015. This Strategy is essential to strengthen the competitiveness of the aviation sector in the EU and to deliver on President **Juncker**'s agenda for jobs, growth and investment in Europe. Commissioner Bulc will therefore invite all parties to swiftly deliver on the [four priorities](#) set out in the strategy. In the margins of the Summit, she will also attend the formal launch of a new airlines' trade-association – Airlines for Europe.

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