



Tuesday, 26 January, 2016

### EU agri-food exports picking up again

After a slight decrease in October 2015, EU agri-food exports in November 2015 picked up again and achieved a value of €10.9 billion, thus exceeding the value of previous years for the same month by about €500 million. EU agri-food exports to third countries increased by 5.7% in value compared to the same period one year ago. Exports to the USA, China – now second export destination thus replacing Russia-, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and South Korea particularly increased in the last 12 months. The highest increases in monthly export values were witnessed for vegetables and citrus fruit as well as for wheat and for live animals. On the other hand, monthly export values went down in particular for wine and for spirits. In November 2015 agri-food imports to the EU remained at €9.5 billion, the same level as in October 2015. Imports of tropical and other fruit, as well as cereals other than wheat, went up, while imports of oilcakes and citrus fruit went down. The trade balance for all EU agri-food products in November 2015 showed a surplus in exports of about €1.3 billion. More detailed statistics are available [online](#).

### Commission invests € 63.8 million in new environmental projects across Member States

The Commission announced today an investment of € 63.8 million for the first-ever "[Integrated Projects](#)" to be funded under the [LIFE programme](#) for the environment. "Integrated Projects" were introduced to implement environmental legislation on a wider scale and increase the impact of funding for plans developed on the regional, multi-regional or national level. The six projects selected have a total budget of € 108.7 million, including € 63.8 million of EU co-financing. They could leverage and coordinate over € 1 billion in complementary funding from EU agricultural and regional funds, as well as national and private funds. The money will support projects in Belgium, Germany, Italy, Poland, Finland, and the UK. EU Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, Karmenu **Vella** said: *"This is an example of Europe directly investing in citizens' quality of life. To best tackle major environmental and health challenges such as air and water pollution or biodiversity loss, existing policies must be made to work towards the same goals. Integrated Projects deliver precisely that."* A [press release](#) and [more information on the projects](#) selected is available.

### EU earmarks €11.5 million for survey programmes for plant pests

The EU has committed close to €11.5 million to support the survey programmes for plant pests in 22 Member States in 2016. A large part of the budget (about 15%) will be dedicated to the survey of *Xylella*

*fastidiosa*, one of the most dangerous plant bacterium worldwide which since 2013 has been affecting olive trees in Apulia (Italy). The bacterium was also found in Corsica and in the region of Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (France) in 2015. An equally high budget allocation will be used for the survey of *Pinewood Nematode*, a microscopic worm attacking coniferous trees which could lead to the devastation of Europe's pine forests. Since 2015, the EU supports the implementation of survey programmes in Member States in view of contributing to a high level of health for plants along the food chain. Timely identification of plant pests at national level and detection of new emerging risks ensures the possibility of early and appropriate action against pests, with high economic and environmental benefits. For more information please see [here](#).

## **TTIP: Commissioner Malmström addresses consumers in Brussels; further negotiating documents published**

EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia **Malmström** delivered today a keynote [speech on the benefits the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership \(TTIP\) would bring EU consumers](#) at a conference organised by the [Transatlantic Consumer Dialogue \(TACD\)](#) on the "precautionary principle". In this speech, Commissioner **Malmström** highlighted that this trade agreement will bring more choice of high-quality goods and services, jobs, higher quality regulation and better cooperation with the US to ensure that the goods consumers buy are produced in sustainable ways. The Commissioner also stressed that TTIP would enshrine the EU's freedom to regulate in a precautionary way. The TACD is a forum of EU and US consumer organisations, which develops and agrees on joint consumer policy recommendations to promote consumer's interests on both sides of the Atlantic. Also today, in line with its transparency initiative, the Commission published a [technical paper for regulatory cooperation on generic medicines outlining](#) the EU objectives in this part of the negotiations with the US. In this paper the EU proposes to make the marketing authorisation process more similar on both sides of the Atlantic, which would allow patients to get access to generic medicines more quickly. In addition, this paper proposes to reduce duplicative clinical trials, which in turn would reduce the exposure of humans in these trials. The [EU position on pharmaceutical products](#) as well as a [factsheet on pharmaceutical products](#) is available online.

## **Erasmus+: More and better opportunities for Europe's future generations**

Today, EU Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Tibor **Navracsics** presented figures concluding that after one year of operation, the Erasmus+ Programme is already living up to expectations. With a budget of over €2 billion in its initial year, Erasmus+ has offered more than one million people the opportunity to take part in 18,000 funded projects. The programme has also supported a record 650,000 mobility grants for students, trainees, teachers, volunteers and other young people and paved the way for the first student loans for a full Master degree abroad. More flexible opportunities for collaboration across sectors are also helping Europe's education, training, youth and sport systems to try out innovative practices and contribute to reform and modernisation. Commissioner **Navracsics** said: *"During the first year Erasmus+ has proved a true success. The impressive number of participants is proof that the programme is making a difference in improving young people's employment prospects, helping them acquire new skills and experiences and supporting the modernisation of Europe's education, training and youth systems. We will continue to build on this popularity to reach out to more people with different interests, profiles and social backgrounds."* A press conference with Commissioner Navracsics will start at 12.00 CET and will be available on [EbS](#). A full [press release](#), [memo](#) and [country factsheets](#) are available here.

## **Commission releases €15 million as part of Macro-Financial Assistance programme for the Kyrgyz Republic**

The European Commission has approved the release of €15 million as part of the EU's Macro-Financial Assistance (MFA) programme for the Kyrgyz Republic. The payment consists of €5 million in grants and €10 million in loans, and is the second and final part of a €30 million MFA programme. Pierre **Moscovici**, European Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxations and Customs, said: *"The EU is committed to supporting the stability, democratic transition and sustainable development of the Kyrgyz Republic. Macro-Financial Assistance provided by the EU helps Kyrgyzstan face the challenges of the difficult economic situation in the region."* The objective of this assistance is to support the restoration of a sustainable external financial situation for the Kyrgyz Republic, to alleviate its balance of payments needs and thereby support its economic and social development. The full press release is available [here](#).

## **The Commission approves four new Protected Geographical Indications and one Protected Designation of Origin**

The Commission has approved the addition of five new products to the register of Protected Geographical Indications (PGIs) and Protected Designation of Origin (PDOs). These are, for Greece, '[Σταφίδα Σουλτανίνα Κρήτης](#)' (Stafida Soultanina Kritis, PGI), dried grapes grown in Crete; for Italy, '[Cantuccini Toscani](#)' / '[Cantucci Toscani](#)' (PGI), a crunchy biscuit produced in Tuscany, and '[Asparago di Cantello](#)' (PGI), asparagus from Cantello in the Varese province; for Spain, '[Ternera de Aliste](#)' (PGI), meat from young cattle reared in the province of Zamora and '[Granada Mollar de Elche](#)' / '[Granada de Elche](#)' (PDO), pomegranate fruits from the Mollar de Elche variety from the province of Alicante. These denominations will be added to the list of more than 1,310 products already protected. More information: webpages on [quality products](#) and [DOOR](#) database of protected products.

## **State aid: Commission opens in-depth investigation into support for Iberpotash in Spain**

Following a complaint, the European Commission has opened an in-depth investigation into whether public measures in favour of Spanish mining company Iberpotash gave it a selective advantage over its competitors, in breach of EU State aid rules. Iberpotash (renamed ICL Iberia Súaia & Sallent in 2014) owns and operates several potash mines in the Catalonia region of Spain. In 2012 the Commission received a complaint alleging that Iberpotash benefitted from several state aid measures to support its mining operations. The Commission will now investigate further whether Iberpotash received illegal state support concerning its obligations to provide financial guarantees related to environmental protection and the financing of environmental protection measures. The opening of an in-depth investigation does not prejudice the outcome of the investigation. The full press release is available online in [here](#).

## **Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Topaz, RPIF and Esso Ireland by Alimentation Couche-Tard**

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of Topaz Energy Group Limited, Resource Property Investment Fund Plc. ("RPIF") and Esso Ireland Limited, all of Ireland, by Alimentation Couche-Tard Inc. ("ACT") of Canada. ACT is a worldwide convenience store operator primarily active in the European Economic Area (EEA) through its petrol station network in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Topaz supplies motor fuels, lubricants, heating oil and aviation fuel to retail and wholesale clients in Ireland and in Northern Ireland. RPIF holds investments in a number of Topaz's properties including service stations and depots. Esso Ireland is active in the retail and wholesale supply of fuel products in Ireland. The companies' activities overlap only for the wholesale

supply of lubricants in the EEA. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns given the companies' moderate positions on this market. The transaction was examined 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.7899](#).

## **EUROSTAT: New peak of almost 2.8 billion tourism nights spent in the EU in 2015**

In 2015, the number of nights spent in tourist accommodation establishments in the European Union (EU) is expected to have reached a new record level of around 2.8 billion nights, up by 3.2% compared with 2014. Since 2009, there has been a steady increase in the number of nights spent in tourist accommodation establishments in the EU, notably driven by the rise in the nights spent by non-residents. A Eurostat press release is available [here](#).

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

### **Energy diplomacy: EU and Turkey to intensify energy relations at High-Level Energy Dialogue in Istanbul**

EU Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy Miguel **Arias Cañete** will travel to Istanbul on 28-29 January to enhance the EU's strategic energy partnership with Turkey. The Commissioner will participate in the first EU-Turkey High-Level Energy Dialogue with the Turkish Minister of Energy and Natural Resources Mr. Berat Albayrak and senior officials from both sides. The discussions will focus on the integration of the Turkish energy market with the EU, energy efficiency and renewables, climate change and follow-up on COP 21, gas markets and interconnections, including the development of the Southern Gas Corridor and the Trans-Anatolian gas pipeline (TANAP), electricity markets and interconnections, nuclear safety, developments in accession negotiations and the opening of Energy Chapter, and regional cooperation and integration in the Energy Community and the Mediterranean. On 29 January, Commissioner Arias Cañete and Minister Albayrak will participate in a roundtable with the representatives of the Turkish private energy sector. Ahead of the visit, Commissioner Arias Cañete said: *"Given its strategic location as transit country in the region, Turkey is a key partner for Europe's energy security and diversification. With the launch of the High-Level Energy Dialogue, Turkey and the EU are injecting renewed political momentum to our energy cooperation. This will lead to concrete actions and projects to our mutual benefit"*. A joint press statement will be published after the High-Level Dialogue on 28 January. For more information see also [Joint Statement](#) following the High-Level Political Dialogue between the EU and Turkey from 25 January 2016.

### **Commissioner Crețu in Prague to discuss the future of Cohesion Policy**

This morning in Prague, Commissioner for Regional Policy Corina **Crețu** met with the Ministers responsible for Cohesion Policy of the Visegrad Group (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland) and of Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia and Slovenia. This was the first high-level discussion on the future of Cohesion Policy. Commissioner **Crețu** said: *"I presented to the ministers and stakeholders four key points that could shape our reflection on the future of the policy: the need for more flexibility, as the refugee crisis has shown, the alignment of our policy with the European economic governance and its concrete impact in terms of growth and jobs, the need for more simplification and the performance of our investments. Cohesion Policy is facing many challenges and I am happy to see that the ministers I have met this morning are eager to support the Commission in its reflection on the post-2020 framework, and to provide their precious inputs."*



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