



**Tuesday, 16 February, 2016**

### **EU agri-food exports remain higher than in previous years**

EU agri-food exports in December 2015 achieved a value of €11.2 billion, thus exceeding the value of previous years for the same month by almost €1 billion. This is an uptake of more than 9% compared to the usual export values in December. Highest increases in monthly export values were recorded for USA, China and Japan, as well as for some Middle East countries, notably Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates. The highest increases in monthly export values were witnessed for wheat as well as for vegetables and for pork. On the other hand, exports decreased since last December for milk powder and hides and skins. EU's agri-food imports also increased compared to December last year. The highest increase in monthly imports was from Ukraine, followed by imports from USA and Australia. Imports of unroasted coffee, tea, wheat, oilseeds and tropical fruits, spices and nuts increased while imports of oilcakes, beet and cane sugar, soya beans and palm oil went down. The trade balance for all EU agri-food products in 2015 showed a surplus in exports of about €16 billion. More detailed statistics are available [online](#).

### **Regions can now apply online for the RegioStars Awards 2016**

From today until 15 April, regions can submit their applications [online](#) for the [RegioStars Awards](#), which honour each year Europe's most inspiring and innovating projects supported by Cohesion Policy funds. This year the jury will select an EU-funded project in each of the following five categories: "SmartGrowth", for innovative projects creating new opportunities in the global economy, "Sustainable Growth" for exemplary projects in the field of Circular Economy, "Inclusive Growth", for projects promoting social inclusion, "CityStars", rewarding solutions for sustainable urban development, and, for the first time, "Effective Management", for outstanding innovation in the fields of simplification and efficient management of the funds. The winners will be announced during the RegioStars Award ceremony, which will take place on 11 October, during the [2016 European Week of Regions and Cities](#).

### **Commission launches public consultation on double taxation**

The European Commission has today launched a public consultation to identify ways to make life easier for businesses experiencing problems with double taxation in the EU. Double taxation can occur when two or more tax jurisdictions impose comparable taxation on the same income or capital. Pierre

**Moscovici**, Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs said: *"It is clear that all companies – big and small – should pay their fair share of tax. But this also means that double-taxation for business should be avoided. We need to ensure that businesses in the EU are not faced with problems of this kind without being given the necessary tools to resolve them. Double or multiple taxation can deter businesses from taking full advantage of their right to operate freely across borders. That is why improving double taxation dispute resolution mechanisms is so important."* [Previous studies](#) have confirmed that current tools to tackle double taxation are not sufficient. The problem has also been raised as part of the OECD's Base Erosion and Profit Shifting guidelines. In this context, the Commission intends to come forward with a legislative proposal to improve dispute resolution for double taxation later in 2016, as part of our [Action Plan for Fair and Efficient Corporate Taxation](#) presented last June. The public consultation will run until 10 May 2016 and is available [here](#).

## **Another step towards the Energy Union: The Commission presents energy security package**

Today, the Commission unveiled a package of energy security measures to equip the EU for global energy transition to address possible energy supply interruptions. Energy security dimension is one of the cornerstones of the Energy Union strategy, a key political priority of the Juncker Commission. The package sets out a wide range of measures to strengthen the EU's resilience to gas supply disruptions. These measures include moderating energy demand, increasing energy production in Europe (including from renewables), further developing a well-functioning and fully integrated internal energy market, as well as diversification of energy sources, suppliers and routes. Further, the proposals bring more transparency to the European energy market and create more solidarity between the Member States. The package is also presented in the light of the new global and universal agreement on climate change, adopted by world leaders on 12 December 2015 in Paris. The Paris agreement sent a strong signal to businesses and policy-makers placing clean energy on an irreversible pathway and setting the scene for a global energy transition. Vice-President responsible for Energy Union, Maroš Šefčovič said: *"The Energy Union Strategy, launched one year ago, promised to provide all Europeans with energy which is secure, sustainable, and competitive. Today's package focuses on the security of our supply, but touches upon all three overarching goals. By reducing our energy demand, and better managing our supply from external sources we are delivering on our promise and enhancing the stability of Europe's energy market."* Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy, Miguel Arias Cañete said: *"After the gas crises of 2006 and 2009 that left many millions out in the cold, we said: 'Never again'. But the stress tests of 2014 showed we are still far too vulnerable to major disruption of gas supplies. And the political tensions on our borders are a sharp reminder that this problem is will not just go away. Today's proposals are about a reliable, competitive and flexible system in which energy flows across borders and consumers reap the benefits. They are about standing together to protect the most vulnerable. And they are about securing our clean energy future: I can assure that our commitment to a clean energy transition is irreversible and non-negotiable."* For more information consult press release [IP/16/307](#) and fact sheets: [MEMO/16/308](#), [MEMO/16/309](#), [MEMO/16/310](#) and [MEMO/16/311](#), as well as the [Energy Union website](#).

## **Commission proposes almost €1.8 million from Globalisation Fund to support former Volvo Trucks workers in Sweden**

The European Commission has proposed to provide Sweden with almost €1.8 million from the [European Globalisation Adjustment Fund \(EGF\)](#) to help 500 former workers of Volvo Trucks in the region of Västerbotten, Sweden, to find new jobs. Marianne Thyssen, EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, commented: *"Redundancies like these are major shocks to regional economies, especially in sparsely populated regions such as Västerbotten. EU solidarity is there to help the dismissed workers upgrade their skills and prepare for new opportunities. It is important for us to support them in this way and to help them find new job opportunities."* Sweden applied for support from the EGF following the dismissal of 647 workers from Volvo Trucks EMEA and four suppliers directly

affected by the dismissals at Volvo Trucks. These job losses were the result of serious disruptions in commercial vehicles' trade in recent years. The measures co-financed by the EGF would help the 500 most disadvantaged workers in their efforts to find jobs by providing them with guidance, training, job-search support, advice on entrepreneurship and business creation, as well as job-search allowances and travel expenses. The proposal now goes to the European Parliament and the EU's Council of Ministers for approval.

### **Antitrust: Commission seeks feedback on commitments offered by container liner shipping companies**

The European Commission is inviting comments from interested parties on commitments offered by fifteen container liner shipping companies to address concerns relating to concerted practices. The Commission has concerns that container liner shipping companies' practice of publishing their future price increase intentions may harm competition and customers by raising prices for their services to and from Europe, in breach of EU antitrust rules. Fifteen container liner shipping companies ("carriers") have regularly announced their intended future increases of freight prices on their websites, via the press, or in other ways. The carriers are China Shipping (China), CMA CGM (France), COSCO (China), Evergreen (Taiwan), Hamburg Süd (Germany), Hanjin (South Korea), Hapag Lloyd (Germany), HMM (South Korea), Maersk (Denmark), MOL (Japan), MSC (Switzerland), NYK (Japan), OOCL (Hong Kong), UASC (UAE) and ZIM (Israel). A summary of the proposed commitments has been published in the [EU's Official Journal](#). Interested parties can submit comments within one month from the date of publication. The full text of the commitments will be available at the [case website](#). The full press release is available online in [here](#).

### **State aid: Commission opens in-depth investigation on public guarantees in favour of German sawmill company Abalon Hardwood Hessen GmbH**

The European Commission has opened an in-depth investigation into two public guarantees issued by Germany in 2006 in favour of Abalon Hardwood Hessen GmbH. This follows a judgment by the General Court of March 2015 (case T-89/09) partially annulling a previous decision by the Commission from 2008. The Commission's decision had found that none of the measures granted by Germany to the company for an investment in Schwalmstadt (Land Hessen) resulted in new state aid within the meaning of EU rules. The Commission will now re-assess whether these guarantees constitute state aid, and if it is the case, whether such state aid is compatible with the internal market. The investigation will examine in particular how to determine the amount of state aid in the public guarantee, and whether it exceeds thresholds up to which aid can be considered compatible with the internal market. The opening of the in-depth investigation gives interested third parties an opportunity to submit comments. It does not prejudice the outcome of the investigation. The non-confidential version of the decision will be available under the case number SA.24030 in the [State aid register](#) on the [DG Competition website](#) once any confidentiality issues have been resolved.

## **STATEMENTS**

### **Joint statement by High Representative/Vice-President Mogherini and Commissioner Stylianides on deadly attacks on hospitals and schools in Syria**

Following yesterday's deadly attacks against medical facilities and schools in Aleppo and Idlib in Northern Syria, HRVP **Mogherini** and Commissioner **Stylianides** issued a joint statement, condemning the attacks as "*completely unacceptable*". The statement continues: "*Our thoughts are with the families of*

*the victims, MSF's medical staff and the humanitarian aid workers. These attacks follow a series of similar assaults against civilian infrastructure happening on an almost daily basis across Syria which are in clear violation of international humanitarian law. Humanitarian organisations carrying out life-saving work in very difficult conditions must be protected. In the case of Syria, these systematic assaults have already broken the country's health system, which suffers from a severe lack of treatment and medicine. A third of hospitals are no longer functioning and nearly half of Syria's doctors were forced to flee, leaving large parts of the country almost completely cut off from any form of medical assistance. In the light of recent agreements reached in Munich and Geneva as regards humanitarian confidence-building measures, we expect all parties to the conflict to refrain from targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure. Innocent civilians have already suffered so much in five years of this bloody conflict and must be protected. The EU will continue to deliver humanitarian aid to Syrians in need of lifesaving assistance, inside Syria and in neighbouring countries, as the leading donor in the international response to the crisis."* The full statement is available [here](#).

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### High level dialogue between the EU and the International Organisation for Migration

EU Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven **Mimica**, is today opening a high-level dialogue with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to exchange views on the best ways to address current and future challenges in the field of migration. Ahead of the event, Commissioner **Mimica** said: *"Migration and forced displacement worldwide have reached unprecedented levels since the Second World War. Helping partner countries find the right way to manage these unprecedented flows has become one of the most burning issues for all of us. In order to be successful, we need to tackle the root causes of the problem, in cooperation with partner countries and international organisations."* William L. Swing, Director General of IOM as well as several departments of the European Commission and the European External Action Service will take part in this yearly one-day event, in a further sign of how crucial this issue is on the current political agenda in Europe and neighbouring regions. More information available [here](#).

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