

TODAYS
News

Friday, 29 April, 2016

Commission adopts proposal by social partners to improve the working conditions in the fishing sector

Today, the European Commission has adopted a proposal for a Directive which aims at improving the working conditions for workers in the fishing sector. In 2013, the EU social partners in the fishing sector reached an agreement, which proposed to align EU law with the ["Work in Fishing" Convention 2007 of the International Labour Organisation \(ILO\)](#). Once adopted by the Council, this directive will implement the social partner agreement, which provides for a higher level of protection of EU fishermen. Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne **Thyssen**, said: *"Protecting our workers and their well-being is a priority for the Juncker Commission. More than 100,000 people in the EU work in the fisheries industry, often under difficult circumstances at sea. The accident and injury rate can be 15 times higher compared to other sectors. Today's proposal will help to reduce the risks that fishermen face at work. The proposal is based on an agreement of the European sectoral social partners and an excellent example of their ability to work together to improve working conditions."* Commissioner for Environment, Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, Karmenu **Vella**, stated: *"The EU is leading the global fight against illegal fishing activities. IUU activity hurts the health and safety of fishermen. Today's proposal will improve the working conditions of fishermen at sea, reduce the incentive for illegal fishing and ensure a healthy and sustainable fishing industry that continues to attract skilled and qualified workers."* More information can be found [here](#).

New EU rules for a simpler, faster and safer Customs Union come into force

New customs rules come into force this Sunday 1 May that will make life simpler for businesses that trade in Europe and better protect consumers against illegal and counterfeit goods. The new [Union Customs Code](#) (UCC) represents a major overhaul of existing EU customs legislation, which dates back to 1992. It is a milestone for the European Customs Union, the framework which allows more than €3 trillion worth of goods to flow in and out of the EU each year. Pierre Moscovici, Commissioner for Economic and

Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs said: "*An efficient EU Customs Union facilitates trade while at the same time enforcing necessary rules for security, safety and intellectual property rights. The new Union Customs Code opens the door to new state-of-the-art IT systems that will provide fast and quality data on goods being traded and will allow extremely close coordination among the administrations of our Member States*". The Customs Union is unique in the world and is essential for the proper functioning of the Single Market. The new UCC reflects a move towards a more modern customs environment for EU countries, making European business more competitive and advancing the EU Strategy for growth and jobs. All press material is available [here](#).

President Juncker to attend Charlemagne Prize award ceremony for Pope Francis

On Friday 6 May in the Vatican, European Commission President, Jean-Claude **Juncker** will join European Parliament President, Martin Schulz, and European Council President, Donald Tusk, at the ceremony to award the [Charlemagne Prize](#) to His Holiness, Pope Francis. The event takes place in the *Sala Regia* of the Pope's official residence, where the three Presidents will deliver a joint eulogy. On the eve of the ceremony, Thursday 5 May, President **Juncker** will take part in a debate on the State of the Union, alongside Italian Prime Minister, Matteo Renzi, German Federal Chancellor, Angela Merkel, and Presidents Schulz and Tusk. Hosted by the board of the Charlemagne Prize, the event will take place at the Capitolini Museum – in the room where the Treaty of Rome was signed in 1957.

Investment Plan for Europe: new EFSI deals signed in Denmark, France, Portugal, Spain and Sweden

The European Investment Fund (EIF) has signed several new agreements today to benefit very small, small and medium-sized businesses in Denmark, France, Portugal, Spain and Sweden. Each transaction benefits from the support of the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI), the heart of the [Investment Plan for Europe](#). In Denmark, the agreement is with Vækstfonden to provide €45 million to innovative green companies. In France, the agreement is with Seventure Partners to provide €56 million to early-stage, high-growth start-ups. In Portugal and Spain, the agreement is with Growth Equity Fund Nmas1 Capital Privado to provide €400 million to tech-oriented Mid-Caps in Spain and Portugal. In Sweden, the agreements are with Almi Företagspartner and Svensk Exportkredit to provide €200 million to sole traders, micro-businesses and innovative SMEs. Also in Sweden the EIF has signed an agreement with Tillväxtverket to launch the 'Swedish Venture Initiative', a venture capital fund-of-funds to support access to equity capital for Swedish early-stage high-growth enterprises.

Georgia joins EU research and funding programme Horizon 2020

Carlos **Moedas**, European Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation, and Ms Tamar Sanikidze, Georgian Minister for Education and Science will today sign an agreement in Brussels associating Georgia to [Horizon 2020](#), the EU's framework programme for research and innovation. The agreement will allow researchers and innovators from [Georgia](#) to be able to participate in Horizon 2020 under the same conditions as their counterparts from EU Member States and other [associated countries](#). Ahead of the signature EU Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation Carlos **Moedas** said: "*I am very pleased to be welcoming Georgia into Horizon 2020, the world's largest public funding programme for research and innovation. EU research, science and innovation is*

open to the world for collaboration and we value working together with our partners to invest in knowledge and innovation for the future. Georgia's association will bring a diversity of expertise and ideas, enriching our international research cooperation." EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes **Hahn** said: *"The full association of Georgia into Horizon 2020 will allow its enterprises and research institutions to become even more competitive and resilient. Georgia is an important partner for the EU and a frontrunner of the Eastern Partnership: extending Horizon 2020 to Georgia is a further, concrete sign of our commitment to closer political association and economic integration with the country."* A [press release](#) will be issued after the signature, foreseen at 15:00. Photos and video will be available on [EbS](#).

Commission proposes the signature and conclusion of the EU-US data protection Umbrella Agreement

Today, the European Commission proposes to the Council the signature and conclusion of the EU-US data protection Umbrella Agreement. On this occasion, Commissioner **Jourová** said: *"The Umbrella agreement will provide high data protection standard when justice and police authorities exchange personal data, such as criminal records, names or addresses across the Atlantic to fight crime and terrorism. The Judicial Redress Act ensures that all EU citizens have the right to enforce data protection rights in U.S. courts, as U.S. citizens already enjoy this right in Europe. This is a historic achievement to rebuild trust in transatlantic data flows and to strengthen the fundamental right to privacy."* In September 2015, the Commission and the U.S. finalised the negotiations. The signature of the Judicial Redress Act by President Obama in February, granting judicial redress rights to EU citizens, opened the way for its signature. The EU-US data protection Umbrella Agreement will put in place a comprehensive high-level data protection framework for EU-US law enforcement cooperation. The Agreement covers all personal data exchanged between the EU and the U.S. for the purpose of prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of criminal offences, including terrorism. It will provide safeguards and guarantees of lawfulness for data transfers, and provide EU citizens the same judicial redress rights as US citizens in case of privacy breaches. The Council shall now adopt a decision authorising the signing of the Agreement. Once the agreement is signed, the decision concluding the Agreement will be adopted by the Council after obtaining the consent of the European Parliament. A [Q&A](#) on the Umbrella agreement is available online, as well as Commissioner's **Jourová** statement on the Judicial Redress act is [here](#).

Commission adopts new prior-surveillance system for import of steel products

The European Commission established today a prior surveillance system for import of steel products into the EU that will serve to anticipate short-term market developments and take the necessary actions, if and when needed. This mechanism is part of a series of measures aiming to support the EU steel sector presented on 16 March in the Commission's Communication "[Steel: Preserving sustainable jobs and growth in Europe](#)". Based on [the Regulation adopted today](#), imports of steel products into the EU will now require an import license. This decision also gives a clear signal to companies, including in exporting countries, that the Commission actively monitors market developments and is willing to take the necessary steps if justified. Prior surveillance measures are foreseen in the EU's safeguard instrument and can be introduced when import trends threaten to cause injury to Union producers. The product scope of the surveillance was decided after consultation

with the EU industry and reflects its recent sensitivities. In the interest of the EU steel industry and employment in the sector and also for legal certainty, this system will be in place for four years. To allow a smooth transition, an additional 21 working days were granted from the entry into force of the regulation, during which imports can still enter into the EU without licence. The steel industry in Europe is world-leading in certain steel product segments, represents 1.3% of EU GDP and provided around 328,000 jobs in 2015. Despite the potential of the European steel sector and the significant efforts made to innovate and modernise, its competitive position on the global steel market has deteriorated in recent years. Excess production of steel in third countries such as China has increased exports, depressed prices, and given rise to an unprecedented wave of unfair trading practices. The Commission will continue implementing further elements of the action plan presented in March.

Euro area unemployment down to 10.2%

The euro area (EA19) seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate was 10.2% in March 2016, down from 10.4% in February 2016, and from 11.2% in March 2015. This is the lowest rate recorded in the euro area since August 2011. The EU28 unemployment rate was 8.8% in March 2016, down from 8.9% in February 2016, and from 9.7% in March 2015. This is the lowest rate recorded in the EU28 for seven years, since April 2009. These figures are published by Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union. A Eurostat press release is available [here](#).

Eurostat: GDP up by 0.6% in the euro area and by 0.5% in the EU28

Seasonally adjusted GDP rose by 0.6% in the euro area (EA19) and by 0.5% in the EU28 during the first quarter of 2016, compared with the previous quarter, according to a preliminary flash estimate published by Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union. In the fourth quarter of 2015, GDP grew by 0.3% in the euro area and by 0.4% in the EU28. A Eurostat press release is available [here](#).

Euro area annual inflation down to -0.2%

Euro area annual inflation is expected to be -0.2% in April 2016, down from 0.0% in March, according to a flash estimate from Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union. Looking at the main components of euro area inflation, services is expected to have the highest annual rate in April (1.0%, compared with 1.4% in March), followed by food, alcohol & tobacco (0.8%, stable compared with March), non-energy industrial goods, (0.5%, stable compared with March) and energy (-8.6%, compared with -8.7% in March). A Eurostat press release is available [here](#).

New decrease in roaming charges before their end in June 2017

As of tomorrow calling, texting or surfing online from another Member States (roaming) will get cheaper. When travelling in the EU, mobile devices users will only pay a small amount on top of their domestic prices: up to €0.05 per minute of call made, €0.02 per SMS sent, and €0.05 per MB of data (excl. VAT). This will be a short transition period since as from

mid-June 2017, Europeans will pay the same price whether they use their mobile devices at home or somewhere else in the EU. Commission Vice-President **Ansip**, responsible for the Digital Single Market, said: *"We're in the home stretch now before the end of roaming charges in 2017. This is not only about Europeans saving money, this is about bringing down barriers in the Digital Single Market"*. The [rules](#) entering into force tomorrow also set the principle of net neutrality rules for the first time in EU law. Commissioner **Oettinger**, in charge of the Digital Economy and Society, said: *"These rules protect the right of every European to access the online content of their choice, without interference or discrimination. They will avoid fragmentation in the Single Market, creating legal certainty for businesses and making it easier for them to work across border"*. More information can be found in this [factsheet](#) and on this [webpage](#).

Discover EU-funded projects near you: launch of the "Europe in my Region" campaign

Today marks the first day of the "[Europe in my Region](#)" campaign, which will run until 11 June, encouraging citizens to discover Cohesion Policy projects near them. Over 1200 events in 23 EU Member States will be organised during the campaign, including many projects opening their doors to the public. *"Projects supported by Cohesion Policy are concrete examples of the EU making a real difference in people's life. A hospital getting new high-tech equipment; a whole village getting access to broadband; a small business getting a loan: these projects are the best ambassadors of our efforts to reach EU goals of growth, jobs and social inclusion. I believe this campaign will help our projects get all the attention they deserve,"* said Commissioner for Regional Policy Corina **Crețu**. More information on [projects supported by Cohesion Policy](#) and on [the European Structural and Investment \(ESI\) Funds](#) is available online.

Eurostat launches early Gross Domestic Product flash estimates

As of today, Eurostat will publish preliminary flash estimates of quarterly Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the euro area and for the European Union at 30 days after the end of the quarter, compared with 45 days previously. This means that both the European and United States' GDP growth rates will now be released at around the same date, which simplifies access to high quality data for people interested in world-wide macro-economic statistics. Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne **Thyssen**, commented: *"'Jobs, growth and investment' is the first priority of this Commission. Gross Domestic Product, GDP, is one of the most important indicators to measure how well our economy is performing. And as the European Union is one of the biggest economies in the world, changes in European GDP are followed closely. Key users, like the European Commission and the European Central Bank, but also national policy makers, business and market analysts and media, will all benefit from the earlier availability of these figures."* The existing release at 45 days after the end of the quarter will continue to be published as at present, containing in addition to the EU and euro area figures, data for all available Member States. Commissioner **Thyssen's** video message can be watched [here](#), and a short introductory video to this new release can be found [here](#).

State aid: Commission authorises support for renewable energy in Italy

The European Commission has concluded that an Italian scheme aimed at supporting electricity generation from renewable energy sources is in line with EU state aid rules. The

scheme will further EU energy and climate goals without unduly distorting competition in the Single Market. In particular, the scheme will support Italy in reaching its EU renewable energy targets by helping to deploy around 1300 megawatts (MW) of additional renewable generation capacity. Under these Commission's 2014 [Guidelines on State Aid for Environmental Protection and Energy](#) Member States can grant state aid for renewable energy, subject to certain conditions. Europe should meet its ambitious energy and climate targets at the least possible cost for taxpayers and without undue distortions of competition in the Single Market. The full press release is available online in [here](#).

Commission approves prolongation of sale deadline for four Italian bridge banks

The European Commission has found a prolongation of the sale deadline for four Italian bridge banks (Nuova Banca delle Marche, Nuova Banca Etruria, Nuova Cassa di Risparmio di Ferrara and Nuova Cassa di Risparmio della Provincia di Chieti) to be in line with EU state aid rules. This prolongation, as requested by Italy, should contribute to the successful conclusion of the ongoing sale of the four bridge banks, which are due to be sold in an open and non-discriminatory process. As with the original deadline, the new deadline is kept confidential in order to protect the effectiveness of the sale process. The four bridge banks were created in November 2015, when the Bank of Italy, Italy's bank resolution authority, put Banca delle Marche, Banca Popolare dell'Etruria e del Lazio, Cassa di Risparmio di Ferrara and Cassa di Risparmio della Provincia di Chieti into resolution. [As approved by the Commission](#), the Italian resolution fund granted €3.6 billion of State aid to cover the difference between the transferred assets and liabilities and to capitalise the bridge banks, and an additional approximate €400 million of State aid by way of guarantees. In order to limit distortions of competition from the state support, Italy had committed to maintain the bridge banks in existence for only a limited period. In view of the prolongation of the sale deadline, Italy provided additional commitments to limit distortions of competition and to ensure that no new State aid would be granted to the bridge banks. The non-confidential versions of the amendment decision will be published in the [State aid register](#) on the [competition](#) website under the case numbers SA.39453, SA.41134, SA.41925 and SA.43547 once confidentiality issues have been resolved.

Concentrations: la Commission autorise la concentration entre CMA CGM et NOL dans le secteur du transport maritime régulier par conteneurs, sous réserve du respect de certaines conditions

La Commission européenne a autorisé, en vertu du règlement de l'UE sur les concentrations, le projet d'acquisition de la compagnie singapourienne Neptune Oriental Lines (NOL) par son concurrent français CMA CGM, compagnie maritime active dans le monde entier. Cette autorisation est subordonnée à la sortie de NOL de l'alliance G6 des compagnies de transport maritime régulier par conteneurs. Compte tenu des mesures correctives proposées, la Commission est parvenue à la conclusion que l'opération envisagée, telle que modifiée, ne poserait plus de problème de concurrence. La décision est subordonnée au respect intégral des engagements contractés. M^{me} Margrethe Vestager, commissaire chargée de la politique de concurrence, a déclaré à ce propos: «*Le transport maritime régulier par conteneurs joue un rôle central dans le commerce mondial, de sorte que la concurrence dans ce secteur est essentielle pour les entreprises et les consommateurs de l'UE. La décision adoptée ce jour garantit que le rachat n'entraînera pas de hausses de prix pour les nombreuses entreprises de l'Union européenne qui font appel à ces services de transport maritime par conteneurs.*» Des informations plus détaillées seront

disponibles sur le site web de la [DG concurrence](#) dans le [registre public des affaires de concurrence](#) de la Commission, sous le numéro [M.7908](#). The full press release is available [online](#).

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Railpool by Pacific Mezz and Oaktree

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of joint control over Railpool of Luxembourg by Pacific Mezz, also of Luxembourg, and Oaktree of the United States. Railpool, currently solely controlled by Oaktree, provides commercial leasing of rolling stock and ancillary services. Pacific Mezz is an investment holding company managed by GICSI, the manager of a diversified global portfolio of investments for the government of Singapore. Oaktree is an investment management firm. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns because none of Pacific Mezz's or Oaktree's portfolio companies operate in a market related to Railpool's activities in the European Economic Area. 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.7998](#).

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of a real estate property portfolio in London by APG, DV4 and QDREIC

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of joint control over a real estate property portfolio located in London by APG Strategic Real Estate Pool ("APG") of The Netherlands, DV4 Limited ("DV4") of the British Virgin Islands and Qatar Diar Real Estate Investment Company ("QDREIC") of Qatar, which is owned by the Qatar Investment Authority. APG is the depositary for an investment fund whose ultimate beneficial owner is Stichting Pensioenfonds ABP, a pension administration organisation that specialises in the field of collective pensions in the public sector. DV4 and QDREIC are both real estate investment funds. The property portfolio comprises two residential real estate units at sites adjacent to the Elephant & Castle rail station and the Olympic Park, both in Greater London. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns because of its limited impact on the market structure. 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.7959](#).

Mergers: Commission clears Echo Prime joint venture by Griffin, LVS II Lux XX and Redefine Properties

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the creation of Echo Prime Properties, a joint venture by Griffin, LVS II Lux XX, both of Luxembourg, and Redefine Properties of South Africa. Echo Prime will be active in the real estate sector in Poland, continuing the commercial real estate activity currently carried out in Poland by Griffin and LVS II Lux XX through their portfolio company Echo Investment S.A. Griffin, which belongs to the global investment company Oaktree, invests in real estate assets and services mainly in Poland. LVS II Lux XX, a subsidiary of the global investment company PIMCO, invests in real estate assets and services. Finally, Redefine Properties invests in real estate assets and services, mainly in South Africa and Australia. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns because of its

limited impact on the market structure. 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.7989](#).

STATEMENTS

Vice-President Georgieva welcomes European Parliament approval of 2014 EU Budget implementation

The European Parliament yesterday approved the European Commission's implementation of the EU budget in 2014, granting the so-called "discharge" with an overwhelming support. Apart from approving the Commission's accounts and its handling of the EU budget, the vote also signals the European Parliament's strong support for the drive to further increase the effectiveness of EU budgetary spending, through the Commission's "[EU Budget Focused on Results](#)" initiative. Vice-President Kristalina **Georgieva**, responsible for budget and human resources, said: *"I am grateful to the Members of the European Parliament for their vote of confidence, and to the rapporteurs for their substantive work. The message is clear: we must continue to improve the quality of spending from the EU budget together with all actors concerned and that means both emphasis on performance and on compliance with the rules. Speedy action on urgent issues like the refugee crisis and humanitarian aid must go hand in hand with controls. The EU budget is our citizens' money. We owe it to them to make sure it goes where it is most needed and that every single euro is used effectively and spent according to the rules."* The full statement is available [online](#).

Statement by Commissioner Thyssen ahead of International Workers' Day

Ahead of International Workers' Day, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne **Thyssen**, stated: *"International Workers' Day is first and foremost an occasion to honour workers all over the world. In Europe, we have all reason to be proud of our social model: The social market economy we practice is a success story. Today, the EU remains the largest economy and the largest single market in the world while ensuring strong protection and high standards of living for Europeans. However, as we are confronted with new challenges such as globalisation, ageing societies and changing work patterns, we cannot solely rely on our past achievements. We need to continue to push for a deeper and fairer internal market, while making sure we safeguard workers' rights in an ever evolving labour market and society."* Read the full statement [here](#).

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Europe Day 2016: 9 May

On Monday 9 May, [Europe Day](#) will be celebrated across the European Union. For the Commission's part, President **Juncker** and other Members of the College will take part in events at national and European level. These include Open-Doors in [Commission Representations](#), citizens' dialogues, debates, conferences and numerous cultural events. Europe Day marks the anniversary of the Schuman Declaration, presented on 9 May 1950

by French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman, which proposed the creation of a European Coal and Steel Community.

Energy diplomacy: Climate Action and Energy Commissioner Arias Cañete at G7 Energy Ministers meeting in Kitakyushu, Japan

EU Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy Miguel **Arias Cañete** will travel to Kitakyushu to participate in the meeting of G7 Energy Ministers on 1-2 May. G7 representatives from France, Germany, Italy, the UK, the US, Japan and Canada will be also participating. The main items on the agenda are global energy security, energy investment for global economic growth and sustainable energy. The meeting will also focus on cyber security of energy infrastructure, innovation and deployment of new energy technologies, as well as on support for energy sector reforms in Ukraine. In the margins of the G7 Energy ministerial meeting, Commissioner Arias Cañete will meet with Japan's Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Motoo Hayashi, United States Secretary of Energy Ernest Moniz, and with Canada's Minister of Natural Resources Jim Carr. In addition to the G7 Energy Ministerial Meeting, Commissioner **Arias Cañete** will also meet Japan's Environment Minister Ms Tamayo Marukawa as well as Japanese industry representatives (Hitachi, Toshiba, Mitsubishi) in Tokyo. For more information visit the website of the [Japanese G7 Presidency](#).

Commissioner Hill meets financial sector businesses in Manchester

Jonathan **Hill**, Commissioner for Financial Services, Financial Stability and Capital Markets Union, is in Manchester today to meet local business leaders and entrepreneurs, as well as to visit a new enterprise hub. In the morning, Commissioner **Hill** will meet the Chief Executives of Pro-Manchester and Midas and participate in a roundtable with business leaders of the UK's second biggest financial centre. Commissioner Hill will take the opportunity of explaining the Commission's agenda to encourage financial services at the EU level and highlight the benefits of the EU Single Market. In the afternoon, the Commissioner will also visit RBS' new business accelerator hub "hatcheries".

Upcoming events

25-29 April: 13th round of negotiations for a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership European Commission - Upcoming events The news: The 13th round of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) negotiations between the EU and the US will take place from 25 to 29 April in New York. This round represents an additional step in the very intensive period of the talks

26-27 May: The EU at the G7 summit in Japan European Commission - Upcoming events The news: The 42nd edition of the G7 will take place from 26 to 27 May in Ise-Shima, in the Mie Prefecture (Japan), under Japanese presidency. The European Union, who is a full member of the G7 (and the G20), will be jointly represented by by the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, and the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk.



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