



Thursday, 13 October, 2016

### European Court of Auditors signs off the EU accounts for 9th year in a row

The European Court of Auditors gave the EU annual accounts a clean bill of health for the 9th year in a row. The Court found that, in particular in cohesion policy and agriculture, the overall estimated level of error for payments has further declined from 4.4% in 2014 to 3.8% in 2015. No errors were found in the examined revenue transactions. Member States manage 80% of the EU budget, and the Commission has developed incentives to encourage each Member State to further improve its management and control systems. The Commission is assisting Member States in this endeavour by sharing good practices, providing guidance and organising training for the national authorities that spend EU funds on the ground. Also, in 2015 the Commission launched the 'EU budget focussed on results' initiative to ensure that EU resources are put to good use for the benefit of citizens and that EU-funded projects demonstrate clear benefits and value for money. In the cases where the Commission finds that EU funds were spent incorrectly, it takes measures to claw the money back - the average being roughly €3 billion every year. For the financial year 2015, the Commission estimates that future claw-back measures could bring the remaining amount at risk to a level between 0.8% and 1.3% of payments. A complete press release is available in all EU official languages [online](#), and answers on frequently asked questions on the annual report of the European Court of Auditors are available [here](#).

### €1.9 billion to support investment in European transport projects

Today the Commission launched a [round of calls for proposals](#) under the EU funding programme for transport infrastructure ('[Connecting Europe Facility](#)'). The Connecting Europe Facility supports the [transition to low-emission mobility](#) and stimulates investment for the purpose of job creation. Examples of projects already being funded include the [Brenner rail tunnel](#) and [Rail Baltica](#). Under this new series of calls, €1.9 billion will be made available to finance key transport projects in Europe, from which €1.1 billion has been earmarked for the [15 EU Member States eligible for the cohesion fund](#) in order to ensure sustainable development in the internal market. For the first time, €40 million will also be dedicated to infrastructure projects linking the EU with its neighbouring countries. Commissioner for Transport Violeta **Bulc** said, "*The EU supports over 460 projects across the territory of the Member States contributing to better mobility and connectivity for European citizens and businesses. With this new call, we are giving more focus to intelligent transport systems across Europe and to infrastructure development in the cohesion states. The Commission is committed to building the transport network of the future while providing to keep countries and regions united.*" More information is available [here](#).

## **State aid: Commission invites comments on revised criteria for implementing unproblematic state support for ports and airports**

The European Commission invites comments on its proposal to revise the criteria for exempting certain investment aid for ports and airports from prior Commission scrutiny under EU state aid rules, by extending the [2014 General Block Exemption Regulation](#) (GBER). It aims to facilitate public investments that can create jobs and growth whilst preserving competition. A [first public consultation](#) on draft provisions earlier this year. In light of views and comments received, the Commission has updated the proposal. Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, stated: "*We have received valuable input to design rules that ensure that public investments can go ahead as quickly as possible without distorting competition in the Single Market. This is important for ports and airports that play a central role for economic growth and regional development.*" The initiative aims to reduce administrative burdens for public authorities and other stakeholders in the context of the [Regulatory Fitness and Performance of EU Legislation](#) (REFIT) agenda. It forms part of the Commission's effort to focus State aid control on bigger cases that genuinely impact competition in the Single Market, to the greatest benefit of consumers. It complements several initiatives the Commission has taken over the past two years in addition to the revisions of the GBER, including the [Notion of Aid Notice](#) as well as [a series of State aid decisions](#) to clarify what public support measures fall outside the scope of EU State aid control. A full press release is available [online](#).

## **Mergers: Commission approves acquisition of Kuka by Midea Group**

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of KUKA Aktiengesellschaft of Germany by Midea Group Co., Ltd of China. Kuka is a producer of industrial robots, also active in the design and production of industrial plants, automated assembly and other industrial machinery. Midea is mainly active in consumer appliances and heating, ventilation and air-conditioning (HVAC) systems. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns given that Midea Group and Kuka are not active in the same, or related, markets. The operation was examined under the simplified merger review procedure. More information will be available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the [public case register](#) under the case number [M.8088](#).

## **Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Nexperia by JAC**

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of Nexperia, of The Netherlands, by Beijing Jianguang Asset Management ("JAC") of the People's Republic of China. Nexperia is the standard products business unit of NXP Semiconductors N.V., focusing on the production of logic integrated circuits and discretets. JAC is an investment management company that focuses its investments on mergers and acquisitions in the semiconductor industry. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, because the overlaps between the activities of JAC and Nexperia with regard to integrated circuits and discretets remain limited both at world-wide level and within 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.8125](#).

## STATEMENTS

### **Speech by European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker at the autumn reception of the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW)**

Speaking yesterday, 12 October, at the autumn reception of the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW), President **Juncker** highlighted the vital role of national promotional banks for the creation of jobs and growth in Europe. The President paid tribute to KfW's contribution to the Investment Plan for Europe, which has now reached the potential to mobilise total investment of €138 billion across 27 Member States. He urged the KfW to offer its expertise to the EU's External Investment Plan for Africa and the EU Neighbourhood, which the Commission proposed last month. *"At a critical moment for the region,"* said President **Juncker**, *"our Plan could raise EUR 44 billion of new investments in infrastructure, SMEs and local communities. If our Member States contribute their share, we can double the number to €88 billion."* (For more information: Alexander Winterstein - Tel.: +32 229 93265)

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### **Johannes Hahn visits the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**

Johannes **Hahn**, Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, will travel to Skopje on Friday 14 October. He will meet with the Prime Minister, the leaders of the four main political parties, the Special Prosecutor as well as representatives of the civil society. The main purpose of the visit is to take stock of political developments and discuss the way ahead, notably regarding the organisation of early parliamentary elections in December and the implementation of the Urgent Reform Priorities, which are crucial. Ahead of the visit Commissioner **Hahn** said: *"I am looking forward to my visit to Skopje. The agreement reached last summer by all main political parties in setting up an election date for this December is a good step. However this is only the beginning: it is important that the conditions of credible elections are fully in place and that the citizens can freely participate. I will meet all main political interlocutors, including the Special Prosecutor and representatives of civil society to discuss also how to speed up the implementation of urgent rule of law reforms. All this is crucial for the [country](#) to make sustainable progress on its path towards the EU. I also look forward to hearing from the Special Prosecutor about how her work is progressing and the challenges she is facing."* Videos and photos of the visit will be available on [EbS](#). The press conference following the meeting with the political leaders will also be available on EbS early afternoon.

### **Commissioner Mimica to sign development programme for Saint Pierre and Miquelon**

Today the Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven **Mimica** and the President of the Territorial Council of Saint Pierre and Miquelon, Stéphane Artano, will sign a development programme for Saint Pierre and Miquelon. The EU will provide €26.35 million under 11th European Development Fund (EDF) for the time period until 2020. The development assistance will be provided as direct budget support in order to finance activities under the Strategic Development Scheme of Saint Pierre and Miquelon. For the period 2015-2020, the main priority for the local government is the sustainable tourism sector, in order to enhance its growth potential and stimulate the local economy (construction, trade, leisure and transport). Speaking ahead of the signing ceremony, Commissioner **Mimica** said: *"The development programme will address the most pressing needs of Saint Pierre et Miquelon to diversify its economy, which is crucial for securing its long-term sustainable development. I*

*trust that this support will create new prospects, especially for young people, by strengthening the economy to produce sustainable jobs and generate a new model of development for the territory." Saint Pierre and Miquelon is a self-governing Overseas Country and Territory of France.*

## **Commissioner Thyssen attends Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council in Luxembourg**

Today, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne **Thyssen**, attends the [Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council \(EPSCO\)](#) taking place in Luxembourg. This morning, Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs reached a political agreement on the [Commission's proposal to amend the Carcinogens and Mutagens Directive](#), which aims to better protect people from the risk of cancer-causing chemicals at work. The Council also reached a political agreement on a [directive dealing with the Work in Fishing Convention 2007](#), which will create a better working environment in the fisheries sector. In addition, the Council held a policy debate on the [New Skills Agenda for Europe](#) and the recent proposal regarding the [revision of the Europass framework](#). This afternoon, Ministers will discuss the 2017 European Semester in view of the Autumn Economic Package, and Commissioner **Thyssen** will present the Commission's [Communication on the Youth Guarantee and the Youth Employment Initiative](#). There will also be an exchange of views on the implementation of the [Council Recommendation on Long-Term Unemployment](#), and Ministers will start to prepare the upcoming [Tripartite Social Summit](#) taking place next week. Finally, the Council will discuss the state of play of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) and exchange views on the best way forward, as well as the [Blue Card for highly skilled employment, the Action Plan on the integration of third-country nationals](#) and the [collaborative economy](#). Later this afternoon, at the end of the Council meeting, there will be a press conference by Commissioner **Thyssen** and her Slovak counterpart, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Ján Richter. The press conference can be followed live [here](#). Commissioner **Thyssen's** speaking points will be made available [here](#).

## **Commissioner Stylianides participates in Citizens' Dialogue in Nicosia**

Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, Christos **Stylianides** will this afternoon participate in a [Citizens' Dialogue in Nicosia](#), where he will engage in open discussions with students and members of the public, as well as representatives of Cypriot civil society, non-governmental organisations and businesses. The main topics are the challenges and priorities for Europe in the coming year. At the Citizens' Dialogue, Commissioner **Stylianides** will also be discussing the benefits of EU humanitarian aid in regions that are struck by civil war and natural disasters. The Citizens' Dialogue will take place at the campus of the University of Cyprus and will be opened by the university's rector, Professor Constantinos Christofides.

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

