NEWS FROM THE COMMISSION MIDDAY BRIEFING
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TODAYS News

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Winter 2017 Economic Forecast: Navigating through choppy waters

Having proven resilient to global challenges last year, the European economic recovery is expected to continue this year and next: for the first time in almost a decade, the economies of all EU Member States are expected to grow throughout the entire forecasting period (2016, 2017 and 2018). However, the outlook is surrounded by higher-than-usual uncertainty. In its Winter Forecast released today, the European Commission expects euro area GDP growth of 1.6% in 2017 and 1.8% in 2018. This is slightly revised up from the Autumn Forecast (2017: 1.5%, 2018: 1.7%) on the back of better-than-expected performance in the second half of 2016 and a rather robust start into 2017. GDP growth in the EU as a whole should follow a similar pattern and is forecast at 1.8% this year and next (Autumn Forecast: 2017: 1.6%, 2018: 1.8%). Valdis **Dombrovskis**, Vice-President for the Euro and Social Dialogue, also in charge of Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, said: *"The economic recovery in Europe continues for the fifth consecutive year. In these uncertain times, however, it is important that European economies stay competitive and able to adapt to changing circumstances. This requires continued structural reform effort. We also need to focus on inclusive growth, ensuring that the recovery is felt by all. With inflation picking up from low levels, we cannot expect current monetary stimulus to last forever. Therefore countries with high deficit and debt levels should continue bringing them down to become more resilient to economic shocks."* **Pierre Moscovici**, Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs, said: *"The European economy has proven resilient to the numerous shocks it has experienced over the past year. Growth is holding up and unemployment and deficits are heading lower. Yet with uncertainty at such high levels, it's more important than ever that we use all policy tools to support growth. Above all, we must ensure that its benefits are felt in all parts of the euro area and all segments of society."* The full press release and forecast are available online.

Over 170 European firefighters return from Chile

Today 177 firefighters from France (69), Portugal (52) and Spain (56) who were sent as part of EU support to help Chile battle forest fires returned home to Europe. The teams landed in Lisbon airport this morning where they were welcomed and thanked personally by Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management **Christos Stylianides**.*"I'm proud to welcome back here in Lisbon today the brave European firefighting teams that put EU solidarity in action by battling heavy forest fires in Chile. They helped save many lives and extinguish the forest fires. Their dedication makes European crisis response a lifesaver in* *emergency situations, all over the world."*said Commissioner **Stylianides**. When the most deadly forest fires in over 50 years struck Chile in recent weeks, the European Commission mobilised firefighting teams, experts and equipment through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, at the request of the Chilean government. Equipment and assistance was also sent by Austria and Sweden. 14 Liaison officers from the Emergency Response Coordination Centre were also deployed to the country.Pictures and video will be available on EBS

State Aid: Commission approves aid to Saarbrücken Airport in Germany to boost regional mobility

The European Commission has approved over €35 million investment aid for the modernisation of the airport infrastructure as well as operating aid to Saarbrücken Airport. Saarbrücken Airport is a regional airport in Saarland, Germany. EU state aid rules, in particular the Commission's 2014 Aviation Guidelines allow Member States to support regional airports under certain conditions. The Commission's assessment showed that the investment aid boosts the regional development and increases the mobility of the residents of Saarland without unduly distorting competition in the Single Market. The operating aid is granted for a limited five-year period until 2019. The Commission also took note that the Saarbrücken Airport has already initiated a consolidation plan to enable it to cover its operating expenses in the future. On this basis, the Commission concluded that the support measures are in line with the Guidelines. The non-confidential version of this decision will be made available under the case number SA.44058 in the State Aid Register on the competition website once any confidentiality issues have been resolved. New publications of state aid decisions on the internet and in the Official Journal are listed in the State Aid Weekly e-News.

State aid: Commission green-lights German green cars infrastructure

The European Commission has decided that Germany's scheme to roll out a network of user-friendly infrastructure for charging electric vehicles across the country is in line with EU state aid rules. Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said that *"Electric vehicles can provide real benefits to society by reducing harmful emissions and noise pollution. The German support scheme will encourage consumers and businesses to use electric vehicles. It will provide the necessary infrastructure in a cost-effective way in line with EU state aid rules"*. At a cost of in total €300 million over four years, this measure promotes the installation of new standard and high-speed charging stations for electric vehicles, as well as the extension of the existing infrastructure. The scheme is open to all, including companies, individuals and local authorities, and support will be awarded progressively through an open and transparent tender procedure. It requires that the electricity for the charging infrastructure comes from renewable energy sources. The Commission considers that this measure will encourage a significant uptake of electric vehicles and therefore make a major contribution towards meeting the common interest of reducing emissions and improving air quality. It addresses a real gap in the market without unduly affecting competition in the Single Market. The measure will also support the European Strategy for low-emission mobility, in particular in terms of the objective of speeding up the deployment of low-emission alternative energy for transport and contributing to the decarbonisation agenda. The full press release is available online in here

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of joint control over Getec Energie companies by EQT Fund Management and Getec Energie Holding

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the proposed acquisition of joint control by EQT Fund Management S.à.r.l., of Luxembourg, together with Getec Energie Holding GmbH (GEH), of Germany, over (i) Getec Heat & Power AG; (ii) Getec Wärme & Effizienz AG; (iii) Getec Media AG; (iv) Getec shared services GmbH; and (v) Getec Contracting GmbH by way of purchase of shares. The Getec Energie companies are specialised in energy contracting in Germany. GEH GmbH is a company active in energy services in connection to production and distribution and in the optimisation of customers' energy supply in the form of heat, steam, cooling and electricity. EQT is an investment fund that seeks to make investments in infrastructure and infrastructure-related assets and businesses in Northern Europe, Continental Europe and North America. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns because of the parties' negligible combined market shares on the relevant markets. The operation was examined under the simplified merger review procedure. More information is available on the Commission's competitionwebsite, in the public case registerunder the case number M.8347.

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Find out **here** what will be discussed next week in the European Commission, the European Council and the European Parliament.