



Monday, 18 March, 2017

### Preparation of the Eurogroup and ECOFIN meetings, 20-21 March 2017

Commissioner **Moscovici** will represent the European Commission at today's meeting of the Eurogroup. At the Eurogroup, ministers will take stock of the progress regarding the second review of the stability support programme for Greece. Ministers will also follow up on the implementation of Draft Budgetary Plans and the budgetary situation in the euro area as a whole. As part of the thematic discussions on jobs and growth, ministers will hold a discussion on pension sustainability in the euro area. Finally, ministers will report on national debt issuance plans to the Commission and to the Eurogroup. Commissioner **Moscovici** will participate in the press conference following the meeting. At tomorrow's ECOFIN, the Commission will be represented by Vice-President **Dombrovskis**, Vice-President **Katainen** and Commissioner **Moscovici**. Ministers will discuss the way forward on the [proposal for reduced VAT rates for e-books and other e-publications](#), part of the Commission's [VAT Action Plan](#). Views will also be exchanged on the proposal for a VAT 'reverse charge' mechanism. If adopted, this proposal would allow Member States to temporarily derogate from the VAT system currently in force across the EU, under strict conditions. As part of the European Semester the Council will discuss the country reports [issued by the Commission in February](#), while ministers are expected to adopt a recommendation on the economic policies of the euro area for 2017. The outcome of the weekend's G20 meeting of finance ministers and central bank governors in Baden-Baden will also be discussed. Vice-President **Katainen** will make a presentation on the [European Defence Fund](#) and ministers will be brought up to date on the state of play of current legislative proposals in the field of financial services. A press conference with Vice-President **Dombrovskis** will follow the meeting.

### Commissioner Malmström in Canada to discuss CETA preparations and EU trade agenda

Commissioner for Trade Cecilia **Malmström** is in Canada today for a two-day visit focused on the preparations for the upcoming entry into force of the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement, known as [CETA](#), and the EU's ambitious agenda for free and fair trade. The trip will kick off today in Toronto, where the Commissioner will visit EU-businesses who are preparing for the entry into force of CETA, including a Cypriot family-run fashion boutique and a Danish-run design showroom and shop. The Commissioner will also visit the construction site of the Eglinton Crosstown Light Rail Transit Project, which is the largest transit expansion in the history of Toronto, and is being delivered by a Canadian-European consortium. Later today, at a conference on ["EU trade policy in a more protectionist world"](#) at the Munk School of Global Affairs, the Commissioner will set out the EU's trade agenda in a keynote speech. The Commissioner will also speak today at an event with senior EU and Canadian business

leaders. On Tuesday, the Commissioner will be in Ottawa, where she will meet the Canadian Minister for International Trade François-Philippe Champagne. The same day, she will also deliver a keynote speech on "The EU's Trade Policy: Effective, transparent, and based on values" at an [event](#) hosted by the think-tank Canada 2020. EbS [photo](#) and video will be available. Info and material (including video) about the visit is available [here](#).

### **Eurostat: Fourth quarter of 2016 - Annual growth in labour costs at 1.6% in euro area - At 1.7% in EU28**

Hourly labour costs rose by 1.6% in the **euro area** (EA19) and by 1.7% in the **EU28** in the fourth quarter of 2016, compared with the same quarter of the previous year. In the third quarter of 2016, hourly labour costs increased by 1.4% and 1.8% respectively. These figures are published by **Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union**. More information [here](#)

### **EUROSTAT: Euro area job vacancy rate at 1.7% EU28 rate at 1.8%**

The job vacancy rate in the euro area (EA19) was 1.7% in the fourth quarter of 2016, up from 1.6% recorded in both the previous quarter and the fourth quarter of 2015, according to figures published by Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union. The job vacancy rate in the EU28 was 1.8% in the fourth quarter of 2016, stable compared with the previous quarter and up from 1.7% in the fourth quarter of 2015. More information [here](#)

### **Commission awards €12.2 million in emergency funding to support Italy in managing the current migratory pressure**

The European Commission has awarded €12.2 million in emergency funding to Italy under the Internal Security Fund (ISF). The funding will help the Italian Coast Guard to strengthen border surveillance and further increase its capacity to save lives at sea. With this latest award, overall emergency funding for Italy now stands at around €75 million, which comes on top of the €592.64 million already allocated to Italy under the national programmes for Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and Internal Security Fund (ISF) 2014-2020 and €62.78 million already awarded in emergency funding.

### **Three companies will be awarded the Horizon Prize at CeBIT 2017 fair for developing a food scanner**

The European Commission will award today at the CeBIT 2017 tech conference a total of €1,000,000 to three innovative companies who cracked the challenge of developing a [food scanner solution](#): an affordable and non-invasive mobile solution that enables users to measure and analyse their food intake. Given the increase in food-related health problems such as obesity, allergies or food intolerance, the Commission launched this prize to help overcome the limitations of current food intake solutions and find radical breakthrough solutions in food scanning at a low price point. A [Horizon Prize](#) rewards innovators who delivered breakthrough solutions in a contest through the EU's [Horizon 2020](#) Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. This is the fourth Horizon 2020 Prize to be awarded. The Commission is present at CeBIT – a yearly international digital business fair held in Hanover, Germany – with its own exhibition

showcasing Digital Single Market policy development and state of the art ICT innovations. The Commission also organises today on CeBIT the conference "Driving the Digital Economy and Society in Europe". Read more about the Commission's participation on the fair [here](#), the link to livestream of the award ceremony at 15:25 can be found [here](#). For an overview of the progress made with the Digital Single Market strategy consult this [factsheet](#).

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### **The 2017 Energy Union tour comes to Slovakia: Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič visits Bratislava**

Today Monday and tomorrow Tuesday, Vice-President for the Energy Union Maroš Šefčovič continues the 2017 Energy Union tour with a visit to Bratislava, in Slovakia. Today at the [Slovak Business Agency](#), the Vice-President participates in the High Level Group on connected and autonomously driving cars. Organised by Slovakia's Deputy Prime Minister for Investments and Informatisation Peter Pellegrini, the forum brings together policy stakeholders, automotive and telecommunication industry representatives and academics around the topic of [Intelligent Transport Systems](#) (ITS). Later today, Vice-President Šefčovič, in a joint meeting with the Slovak Minister of Economy Peter Žiga and with the Slovak Minister of the Environment László Solymos, will focus on Slovakia's implementation of the 2030 energy and climate framework, the Energy Union governance (including the preparation of the Integrated [National Energy and Climate Plans](#)) and the [Clean Energy for All Europeans](#) package. Tomorrow at the economic [HNClub discussion forum](#), together with Slovakia's Deputy Prime Minister Pellegrini and Mayor of Bratislava Ivo Nesrovnal, in the presence of Members of the Slovak Parliament, the Vice-President will participate in a [Citizen's dialogue](#) to discuss several topics in relation to Energy Union and Slovakia, including the opportunities offered by the [Investment Plan](#), [Smart Cities](#) and the importance of innovation to energy and transport sectors. The Citizen's dialogue will start at 10:00 CET and can be followed live. *"The future belongs to those who innovate. Slovakia as an EU Member State with an important car industry plays an important role in fostering new mobility patterns and in promoting low-emission and zero-emission vehicles"*, said Vice-President Šefčovič ahead of the visit to Slovakia. During the 2017 Energy Union Tour, the Vice-President has already visited [the Netherlands](#) and [Spain](#). Upcoming dates and more information on the 2017 Energy Union tour are available [here](#). More information on Energy Union is available [here](#).

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

Johannes **Hahn**, Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, will travel to Skopje on Tuesday 21 March, together with the Members of the European Parliament Eduard Kukan, Knut Fleckenstein and Ivo Vajgl, EP mediators for the 15 July 2015 Pržino Agreement. Together, they will meet with political representatives. They will reiterate the EU's firm line to respect the outcome of the elections and allow democratic processes to proceed, and to rapidly form a reform-oriented government which will continue implementation of the Pržino Agreement. Last week, during the [Western Balkans Six Leaders' summit](#), in Sarajevo, Commissioner **Hahn** outlined the importance of regional cooperation and warned about the risk of fuelling inter-ethnic tensions, by statements or actions that could undermine good neighbourly relations. Videos and photos of the visit will be available on [EbS](#).

### **Commissioner Arias Cañete in Berlin to participate in Energy Transition Dialogue**

On 20 March, Climate Action and Energy Commissioner **Arias Cañete** will participate in the 2017 edition of the [Berlin Energy Transition Dialogue](#). The Berlin Energy Transition Dialogue brings together key

international decision-makers in energy policy, industry, science and civil society as well as foremost energy experts from all over the world. The Berlin Energy Transition Dialogue 2017 will be particularly important as Germany holds the presidency of the G20. This year's session will focus on how to successfully align the energy system with the targets of the Paris Agreement in a cost efficient way; and how to set the right framework to trigger the necessary investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy. On Monday at 14:30, Commissioner **Arias Cañete** will open the session "Making markets ready for the Energy Transition" ([live webstream available](#)). The Commissioner's address will be followed by speeches from other high-level participants, including Nur Bekri, Chairman of the National Energy Administration of China; Leonardo Beltrán, State Secretary at México's Ministry of Energy; Abderrahim El Hafidi, Secretary General at Morocco's Ministry of Energy, Mines, Water and Environment, and CEO's of major energy organisations. The Clean Energy for all Europeans Package ([read IP/16/4009](#)) was presented on 30 November 2016 with a view to speeding both the clean energy transition and growth and job creation, leading the way to the EU's [Energy Union](#), one of the ten priorities of the Juncker Commission.

### **Commissioner Avramopoulos in Warsaw**

Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Dimitris **Avramopoulos** will be in Warsaw, Poland tomorrow where he will meet with the Polish Minister of Interior and Administration Mariusz Błaszczak to discuss EU migration and border policy. Commissioner Avramopoulos will also visit the headquarters of the European Border and Coast Guard to discuss the progress made in making the new Agency fully operational. A joint press conference with the Executive Director of the European Border and Coast Guard Fabrice Leggeri will be held at 13h30 and can be followed live on [EbS](#).

### **Commissioner Vella visits Zadar, Croatia**

Commissioner **Vella** is in Zadar, Croatia to participate in a conference on the Commission's proposal for a [Multiannual Plan for small pelagics in the Adriatic](#), namely for anchovy and sardines. The event is an opportunity to exchange views on the recent proposal with stakeholders from all Adriatic Member States and regional fisheries organisations. The plan, presented to the Fisheries Ministers of the EU Member States on 6 March, is the third multiannual plan that the Commission is putting forward since the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy and the first ever for the Mediterranean. When fully implemented it would increase stocks by 20% and bring up profits to fishermen of around 10%. The plan marks a milestone in the Commission's approach to fisheries management, and it can show that long-term viability of fisheries is possible in a sea basin in which 93% of the fish stocks are over-exploited. Further to the conference, Commissioner **Vella** will meet with the Minister for Environment and pay a visit to the Port of Zadar to meet the local fishermen. Commissioner's speech is available [here](#).

## **COMING UP**

- [Thursday 23 March: Digital Day in Rome](#)
- [March 2017: Commission White Paper on the Future of Europe and Rome Summit to mark the 60th Anniversary of the Treaties of Rome](#)
- [March 2017 : 3rd Report on the Partnership Framework on Migration](#)

- [The Commission will present a revised Action Plan on Return and a Recommendation to Member States for an efficient EU return policy](#)

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