



Daily News 19 / 03 / 2015

Brussels, 19 March 2015

Fighting tax evasion: Commission concludes negotiations with Switzerland on landmark tax transparency agreement

The Commission today concluded negotiations on an ambitious new tax transparency agreement with Switzerland, marking a major step forward in the fight against tax evasion. Under this new agreement, Member States and Switzerland will automatically exchange information on the full range of financial account information from 2018. This means that EU residents will no longer be able to hide undeclared income in Swiss accounts to evade paying tax. **Pierre Moscovici**, Commissioner for Economic and Financial Affairs, Taxation and Customs, said: *"Today we are taking a decisive step towards total tax transparency between Switzerland and the EU. I am confident that our other neighbours will soon follow suit. This transparency is vital to ensure that each country can collect the tax revenues it is due."* Member States will receive, on an annual basis, the names, addresses, tax identification numbers and dates of birth of their residents with accounts in Switzerland, as well as a broad set of other financial and account balance information. This is fully in line with the new [OECD/G20 global standard for the automatic exchange of information](#). The new EU-Swiss agreement was initialised by Commission and Swiss negotiators this morning. It will be signed following authorisation by the Council on one side and the Swiss Government on the other, both of which are expected to be before the summer. (for more information: Vanessa Mock - Tel.: +32 229 56194, Johannes Bahrke - Tel.: +32 229 58615)

Tripartite Social Summit: focus on jobs, growth and investment for Europe

At the Tripartite Social Summit this morning, EU leaders and social partners focused on jobs, growth and investment priorities for Europe. The participants in the Social Summit discussed the analysis of the Member States's economic situation contained in the [Country Reports](#) recently published by the Commission, as well as the preparation of the further steps in the [European Semester](#) of economic policy coordination, including the preparation of national programmes expected in April. The Social Summit also discussed progress with the Investment Plan for Europe and the views of social partners on other major EU policy initiatives, such as the [Energy Union](#). A press release is available [online](#). (for more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Annika Breidhardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153)

Signature of EU-Greenland association agreement

President Juncker today participated in a signing ceremony, alongside Greenlandic Premier Kim Kielsen and Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt, of a "Joint Declaration" on the relationship between the EU and Greenland. The Joint Declaration signed on 27 June 2006 needed to be updated as it did not reflect the institutional changes that have taken place, in the meantime, within the Kingdom of Denmark. The Declaration confirms the long lasting links between the European Union and Greenland and reiterates the geostrategic importance of Greenland to the EU. [Watch the ceremony online](#). (for more information: Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456)

OTHER NEWS

European Commission presents EU Trade and Investment Barriers Report

Today, the Commission presented to the European Council the fifth edition of the [Trade and Investment Barriers Report](#). Identifying concrete obstacles to trade, it concludes that the EU's strategic economic partners – Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Japan, Russia, and the United States – maintain a variety of barriers that significantly hinder international trade and investment opportunities of EU companies. *"After years of turmoil, the global economy is improving. In these conditions, it's disappointing to see so many obstacles to trade and investment persist. Now more than ever, determination is needed to level the playing field and get rid of barriers,"* EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia **Malmström** commented. The Trade and Investment Barriers Report is part of a broader EU trade enforcement strategy set out in the Commission Communication ["Trade, Growth and World](#)

[Affairs](#)" published in 2010. A new report has been presented to the European Council every spring since 2011. A press release is available [online](#). (for more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel. +32 229 56185; Joseph Waldstein – Tel.: +32 229 56184)

State aid: Commission endorses £640 million compensation for UK postal network from 2015 to 2018

The European Commission has approved UK plans to grant £640 million to the UK Post Office Ltd for delivering a whole range of the public services in its entire network. The Commission found the measure to be in line with EU state aid rules in particular because the compensation paid to Post Office Ltd is limited to the additional costs it faces to fulfil its public service mission. EU Competition Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager** said: "Today's decision will make sure that those UK citizens who live in more remote areas will also have access to a post office and the services it provides. EU state aid rules enable Member States to fund services of general public interest, and provide a framework to ensure that there is no overcompensation of the service provider." A [press release](#) is available online. (for more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Yizhou Ren – Tel.: +32 229 94889)

Antitrust: Commission welcomes Court judgment upholding its bananas cartel decision

The European Commission welcomes today's judgment by the EU Court of Justice (EUCJ, case [C-286/13 P](#)) dismissing the appeal brought by banana importer Dole against a General Court (GC) judgment of 2013 (case [T-588/08](#)). The judgment entirely confirmed the Commission's assessment of the bananas cartel case in relation to Dole. It also confirms that communications between competitors leading to horizontal price-fixing through a cartel are anticompetitive by their very object and amount to a violation of EU antitrust rules, without requiring an analysis of their effect on competition in the market. [In October 2008](#), the Commission fined Dole, Weichert and Del Monte a total of €60.3 million for participating in a cartel for bananas in Northern Europe. A [statement](#) is available online. (for more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Yizhou Ren – Tel.: +32 229 94889)

Mergers: Commission approves acquisition of joint control over AsiaSat by Carlyle and CITIC

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the proposed acquisition of joint control over Asia Satellite Telecommunications Holdings Limited of Bermuda by The Carlyle Group, L.P. of the US and CITIC Group Corporation of China. AsiaSat provides satellite communications services. Carlyle manages funds that invest inter alia in corporate private equity, real estate, infrastructure and energy. CITIC is active in a wide range of areas including financial services, real estate, engineering, energy, infrastructure construction, machinery manufacturing and IT. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would not raise competition concerns, in particular because AsiaSat's activities in the European Economic Area (EEA) do not overlap with those of Carlyle and CITIC. The operation 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.7504](#). (for more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel. +32 229 80100; Carolina Luna Gordo – Tel.: +32 229 68386)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Scotrail franchise by Abellio Scotrail

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of Scotrail franchise by Abellio Scotrail Limited, both of the United Kingdom. Abellio Scotrail is a subsidiary of Abellio Transport Holding BV which belongs to the Dutch railways, Nederlandse Spoorwegen group of the Netherlands. The Scotrail franchise provides inter-city, regional and suburban passenger rail services throughout Scotland. Abellio Scotrail was established to bid for and operate the franchise. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would not raise competition concerns, because of its limited impact on the market structure. The transaction was examined under the normal merger review procedure. More information is available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the [public case register](#) under the case number [M.7483](#). (for more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel. +32 229 80100; Carolina Luna Gordo – Tel.: +32 229 68386)

EUROSTAT: Fourth quarter of 2014 - Euro area job vacancy rate up to 1.8%; EU28 up to 1.7%

The job vacancy rate in the euro area (EA18) was 1.8% in the fourth quarter of 2014, up from 1.6% recorded both in the previous quarter and in the fourth quarter of 2013, according to figures published by Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union. The job vacancy rate in the EU28 was 1.7% in the fourth quarter of 2014, up from 1.6% in the previous quarter and from 1.5% in the fourth quarter of 2013. A [EUROSTAT press release](#) is available online. (for more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Tove Ernst – Tel.: +32 229 86764)

EUROSTAT: Fourth quarter of 2014 - Annual growth in labour costs down to 1.1% in euro area; Down to 1.4% in EU28

Hourly labour costs rose by 1.1% in the euro area (EA18) and by 1.4% in the EU28 in the fourth

quarter of 2014, compared with the same quarter of the previous year. In the third quarter of 2014, hourly labour costs increased by 1.4% in the euro area and by 1.5% in the EU28. The two main components of labour costs are wages & salaries and non-wage costs. In the euro area, wages & salaries per hour worked grew by 1.0% and the non-wage component by 1.2%, in the fourth quarter of 2014 compared with the same quarter of the previous year. In the third quarter of 2014, the annual changes were +1.4% for both components. In the EU28, hourly wages & salaries rose by 1.4% and the non-wage component by 1.6% for the fourth quarter of 2014. In the third quarter of 2014, annual changes were +1.4% and +1.7% respectively. A [EUROSTAT press release](#) is available online. (for more information: Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Tove Ernst – Tel.: +32 229 86764)

EU Biodiversity strategy: Report finds one in ten EU wild bees under extinction

Europe's wild bees are in decline, according to new scientific research published today, co-funded by the European Commission as part of the International Union for Conservation of Nature ([IUCN](#)) European Red List of Bees and the Status and Trends of European Pollinators (STEP) project. The report reveals that 9.2% of European wild bee species are threatened with extinction, while 5.2% are considered likely to be threatened in the near future. Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries Karmenu **Vella** said: "Our quality of life – and our future – depends on the many goods and services that nature provides for free. If we don't address the roots of the decline in wild bees, and act urgently to stop it, we could pay a very heavy price indeed." Europe has an [ambitious strategy](#) to halt the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystem services in the EU by 2020, and restore them so far as feasible. More information available on the Commission's [environment](#) website. (for more information: Enrico Brivio: + 32 229 56172; Iris Petsa – Tel.: + 32 229 93321)

Agriculture: Commission proposes to extend application deadline for direct payments

The Commission has today proposed the extension of the deadline of aid applications for Direct Payments to Monday June 15th. This represents an extension of one month on the original May 15th deadline. The extension would also apply to area-based payments in the Pillar II of the CAP. Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Phil **Hogan**, explained: "I have proposed to allow Member States to extend the deadline so that farmers do not suffer the consequences of delays on the part of administrations, which are faced with the challenge of the first year of implementation of the new Common Agricultural Policy. Member States can now take up this option, which should also help avoid penalties for late applications from recipients" adding that "It goes without saying that Member States who would decide to postpone the final date for submission of aid application should ensure that their administration and control system allow safeguarding sound financial management". Deadlines to submit aid applications are fixed by the Member States and, under current rules, shall not be later than 15 May. The extension would apply for 2015 only and will be voluntary. (For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel: +32 229 56 185; Clémence Robin – Tel: +32 229 52 509)

Commission appoints Chair of European Financial Reporting Advisory Group

The European Commission today decided to appoint Mr Wolf Klinz as President of the Board of the European Financial Reporting Advisory Group ([EFRAG](#)). EFRAG was established in 2001 to provide technical expertise and advice to the European Commission on accounting matters. Mr Klinz, a former member of the European Parliament, is due to take office after his nomination is submitted to the European Parliament and Council and after appointment by the General Assembly of EFRAG. For more information, click [here](#). (for more information: Vanessa Mock: + 32 229 56194; Maud Scelo – Tel.: + 32 229 81521)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

High Representative/Vice-President Mogherini and Commissioner Mimica attend EU-CELAC (Community of Latin America and Caribbean states) Civil Society Forum on 19-20 March

Today, High Representative/Vice-President Federica **Mogherini** will [address the opening session](#) of the [II EU-CELAC Civil Society Forum](#) in Brussels. This is being organised by the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development (CONCORD) and the *Mesa de Articulación de Asociaciones Nacionales y Redes Regionales de ONG de América Latina y el Caribe* (MESA de Articulación), and forms part of the events in the run-up to the [upcoming EU-Caribbean Latin American \(CELAC\) summit in Brussels taking place in Brussels on 10-11 June 2015](#). Commissioner **Mimica** is also attending the EU-CELAC Civil Society Forum and will deliver a speech during the closing session on Friday 20 March. (for more information: Catherine Ray – Tel.: +32 229 69921; Sharon Zarb – Tel.: +32 229 92256)

Commissioner Bulc and seven Transport Ministers from the Alpine states in Austria to promote sustainable transport

On 19 and 20 March 2015, Commissioner **Bulc** will attend a congress in Innsbruck (Austria) with seven

Transport Ministers from the Alpine States (Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Liechtenstein, Slovenia and Switzerland) to discuss the development of transport solutions across the Alpine region. In the presence of some 500 participants, the Commissioner, Ministers and promoters of key Alpine crossing projects will discuss the challenges of preparing, implementing and financing large-scale projects that cross borders of several Member States. Once completed, these projects will significantly change the flow of goods and passengers' mobility across the Alps, and improve economic relations. On 20 March the Commissioner and the Ministers will sign a declaration renewing their commitment to further promote sustainable transport in the region. Commissioner **Bulc** said: *"An integrated and future-oriented transport system for the Alpine region is vital for both the overall performance of Europe's transport system and the preservation of nature and peoples' living conditions in this region. With our [trans-European transport network's](#) policy, we have powerful instruments to help drive this forward."* More information available [here](#). (for more information: Jakub Adamowicz – Tel.: +32 229 50595; Joshua Salsby – Tel.: +32 229 72459)

Commissioner Corina Crețu in Germany on 19 and 20 March

On 19 March, in Berlin, Commissioner for Regional Policy Corina **Crețu** will meet with NGO Transparency International to launch the [Integrity Pacts](#) project, developed to help governments, businesses and civil society improve trust and transparency in public procurement for several EU co-funded projects by the [European Regional Development Fund](#) and the [Cohesion Fund](#). She will then be attending the 61st meeting of the [German-Austrian Urban Network](#), which brings together German and Austrian cities to exchange experiences and good practices in urban policies. On 20 March she will visit the cities of Frankfurt (Oder) and Slubice (in Poland) on the German-Polish border, to talk about cross-border cooperation in the region for the new programming period 2014-2020. More information on Cohesion Policy and Germany is available [here](#). (for more information: Jakub Adamowicz – Tel.: +32 229 50595; Sophie Dupin de Saint-Cyr – Tel.: +32 229 56169)

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