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Coronavirus: EU global response to fight the pandemic

Today, the European Commission and the High Representative have set out plans for a robust and targeted EU response to support partner countries' efforts in tackling the coronavirus pandemic. The EU's collective action will focus on addressing the immediate health crisis and resulting humanitarian needs, strengthening partner countries' health, water and sanitation systems and their research and preparedness capacities to deal with the pandemic, as well as mitigating the socioeconomic impact. The EU will secure financial support to partner countries amounting to more than €15.6 billion from existing external action resources, of which €3.25 billion will be channelled to Africa. The President of the European Commission, Ursula **von der Leyen**, commented: *"The virus knows no borders. This global challenge needs strong international cooperation. The European Union is working tirelessly to fight the pandemic. We all know that only together we can stop the worldwide spread of the coronavirus. To that end, the EU will soon convene a virtual pledging event to help mobilise the necessary funding and support the World Health Organisation to assist the most vulnerable countries."* A [press release](#), a [factsheet](#) and a [memo](#) are available online. (For more information: Ana Pisonero – Tel.: +32 229 54320; Gesine Knolle – Tel.: +32 229 54323)

Coronavirus: Commission adopts Recommendation to support exit strategies through mobile data and apps

Today, the Commission recommends steps and measures to develop a common EU approach for the use of mobile applications and mobile data in response to the coronavirus pandemic. The [Recommendation](#) sets out a process towards the adoption with the Member States of a toolbox, focusing on two dimensions: First, a pan-European coordinated approach for the use of mobile applications for empowering citizens to take effective and more targeted social distancing measures and for warning, preventing and contact tracing. The toolbox includes specifications to ensure effectiveness of these applications from a medical and technical point of view, support for interoperability, governance mechanisms for public health authorities, and mechanisms for data sharing. Second, a common approach for modelling and predicting the evolution of the virus through anonymised and aggregated mobile location data, building on the [work initiated](#) with mobile phone operators on 23 March 2020. This will provide insights for the development of strategies for opening up societies again. Commissioner for Internal Market, Thierry **Breton** said: *"Digital technologies, mobile applications and mobility data have enormous potential to help understand how the virus spreads and to respond effectively. With this Recommendation, we put in motion a European coordinated approach for the use of such apps and data, without compromising on our EU privacy and data protection rules, and avoiding the fragmentation of the internal market. Europe is stronger when it acts united."* Commissioner for Justice, Didier **Reynders**, added: *"We all must work together now to get through this unprecedented crisis. The Commission is supporting the Member States in their efforts to fight the virus and we will continue to do so when it comes to an exit strategy and to recovery. In all this, we will continue to ensure full respect of Europeans' fundamental rights. Europe's data protection rules are the strongest in the world and they are fit also for this crisis, providing for exceptions and flexibility. We work closely with data protection authorities and will come forward with guidance on the privacy implications soon."* You can find more information on the recommendation and the next steps in the [press release](#). (For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Charles Manoury – Tel.: +32 229 13391; Marietta Grammenou – Tel.: +32 229 83583)

Antitrust: Commission provides guidance on allowing limited cooperation among businesses, especially for critical hospital medicines during the coronavirus outbreak

The European Commission has published a [Temporary Framework Communication](#) to provide antitrust guidance to companies cooperating in response to urgent situations related to the current coronavirus outbreak. The coronavirus outbreak has given rise to a general supply shock resulting from the disruption of supply chains and a demand surge caused mainly by a steep rise in demand for certain

products and services, notably in the health sector. These circumstances risk leading to shortages in critical medical goods, which may worsen as the pandemic evolves. The Temporary Framework is meant to provide antitrust guidance to companies willing to temporarily cooperate and coordinate their activities in order to increase production in the most effective way and optimise supply of, in particular, urgently needed hospital medicines. In most situations, the oral guidance that the Commission has been giving to companies is sufficient. However, the Commission is also ready to exceptionally provide companies with written comfort concerning specific cooperation projects that need to be swiftly implemented in order to effectively tackle the coronavirus outbreak. The Commission is also using today this procedure for the first time and is providing a comfort letter to "[Medicines for Europe](#)". In the current circumstances, the temporary cooperation appears justifiable under EU antitrust law. Executive Vice-President Margrethe **Vestager** in charge of competition policy said: *"We need to make sure that there is sufficient supply of the critical hospital medicines used to treat coronavirus patients. To avoid the risk of shortages of essential and scarce products and services because of the unprecedented surge in demand due to the pandemic, we need businesses to cooperate and do it in line with European Competition rules. So to ensure supply we will urgently provide businesses with sufficient guidance and comfort to facilitate cooperation initiatives boosting the production of products in high demand. The temporary framework adopted today explains when and how firms can obtain guidance or written comfort in line with our competition rules."* The full press release is available [online](#). (For more information: Arianna Podesta – Tel. +32 229 87024; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Coronavirus: Commission kick-starts the work of the new Single Market Enforcement Task Force to remove restrictions to the Single Market

The Commission convened a first meeting with Member States as part of the new Single Market Enforcement Task Force (SMET) to discuss the urgent need to allow the free flow of goods such as face masks, medical supplies and food across the EU. Commissioner for Internal Market, Thierry **Breton**, said: *"The coronavirus outbreak has made it crystal clear that no country can fight this virus alone. Europe needs to act together with solidarity. Restrictions endanger this solidarity and prevent essential goods from reaching those who need them most. The Single Market is the backbone of our joint response and we need decisive action to lift any restrictions undermining it."* The creation of SMET was announced in the [Commission's Single Market Enforcement Action Plan](#) on 10 March in the context of the [industrial strategy](#). The Task Force was envisaged as a platform for Member States and the Commission to work together to ensure better compliance with Single Market rules. This first meeting kick-started the work of the new Task Force in light of the urgency of issues hampering the correct functioning of the Single Market, mainly intra-EU export restrictions of vital protective, medical and medicinal supplies, border controls and the need to increase production of essential equipment. This also aims at implementing the clear guidance of Europe's leaders given at the European Council of 26 March to remove all internal bans or restrictions to the free movement of goods. The task force will be convened on a regular basis to discuss issues concerning enforcement issues in the Single Market. (For more information: Sonya Gospodinova – Tel.: +32 229-66953; Federica Miccoli – Tel.: +32 229-58300)

ESCALAR: jusqu'à 1,2 milliard d'euros pour aider les entreprises à fort potentiel à croître et à se développer en Europe

Aujourd'hui, la Commission lance ESCALAR, une nouvelle approche d'investissement, développée en collaboration avec le Fonds européen d'investissement (FEI), qui soutiendra le capital-risque et un financement de croissance pour les entreprises prometteuses, leur permettant de se développer en Europe et de renforcer la souveraineté économique et technologique de l'Europe. Dans sa phase pilote, ESCALAR fournira jusqu'à 300 millions d'euros soutenus par le Fonds européen pour les investissements stratégiques. Cela visera à accroître la capacité d'investissement des fonds de capital-risque et de capital-investissement, déclenchant des investissements pouvant atteindre 1,2 milliard d'euros, soit quatre fois l'investissement initial, pour soutenir les entreprises prometteuses. ESCALAR est l'une des initiatives annoncées dans la [nouvelle stratégie pour les PME](#) pour améliorer l'accès au financement des PME, qui devient particulièrement pertinente dans la situation économique difficile à laquelle les PME sont confrontées en raison de l'épidémie de coronavirus. ESCALAR soutiendra les entreprises innovantes pendant et après la crise pour garantir que l'Europe puisse se développer et rester à la tête des développements technologiques mondiaux et accélérer sa reprise économique. Le commissaire au marché intérieur, Thierry **Breton**, a déclaré: *« La Commission déploie tous les outils à sa disposition pour aider les entreprises à surmonter la crise du coronavirus. Aujourd'hui, nous renforçons notre soutien aux nombreuses entreprises européennes prometteuses pour qu'elles puissent continuer à se développer en Europe. Avec ESCALAR, nous aidons à débloquer d'importants*

investissements privés supplémentaires pour soutenir la création des leaders du marché de demain. » Les gestionnaires de fonds intéressés peuvent participer au programme en répondant à l'appel ouvert à manifestation d'intérêt [publié aujourd'hui par le Fonds européen d'investissement](#). Un communiqué de presse contenant des informations supplémentaires sur ESCALAR est disponible [ici](#). *(Pour plus d'informations: Sonya Gospodinova – Tél.: +32 229-66953; Federica Miccoli – Tél.: +32 229-58300)*

COLLEGE MEETING: a new Director-General for the Joint Research Centre

Today, the European Commission has decided to transfer Mr Stephen Quest in the interest of the service from his current function of Director-General of Directorate-General for Taxation and Customs Union (TAXUD) to the function of Director-General of the Joint Research Centre (JRC). This transfer will take place on 1 May 2020. Mr Quest joined the Commission in 1993. He has acquired significant experience at senior management level in the Commission, which he will bring to the Joint Research Centre, having been Director of the Office for the Administration and Payment of Individual Entitlements (PMO) from 2010 until 2013, and then Director-General of Directorate-General for Informatics (DIGIT) for nearly three years. He became Director-General of TAXUD in 2016. *(For more information: Balazs Ujvari – Tel.: +32 460 760296; Claire Joawn – Tel.: +32 460 756859)*

State aid: Commission approves €5.4 billion Danish scheme to compensate companies particularly affected by the coronavirus outbreak

The European Commission has approved under EU State aid rules a DKK 40 billion (approximately €5.4 billion) Danish scheme that compensates companies particularly affected by the coronavirus outbreak, up to a maximum of DKK 60 million (approximately €8 million) per company. Under the scheme, private companies registered in the Danish Central Business Register (CVR), which have a proven decline in revenues of more than 40 % because of the coronavirus outbreak in the period from 9 March to 9 June 2020, will be entitled to compensation for the damages suffered. In particular, they will be compensated in part or in full for the fixed costs that they continue to bear. The Commission assessed the measure under Article [107\(2\)\(b\)](#) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which enables the Commission to approve State aid measures granted by Member States to compensate specific companies or specific sectors (in the form of schemes) for the damages directly caused by exceptional occurrences, such as the coronavirus outbreak. The Commission concluded that the scheme is in line with EU State aid rules, in particular Article 107(2)(b) TFEU, as it will contribute to mitigate the negative consequences of coronavirus for Danish businesses, without unduly distorting competition in the Internal Market. Executive Vice-President Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said: *"The coronavirus outbreak has a severe economic impact. Many companies see their revenues declining sharply, while their losses are growing. The €5.4 billion Danish scheme approved today enables Denmark to compensate businesses at least in part for the damages suffered during this difficult moment. We will continue to work closely with Member States to find solutions to help companies get through these difficult times, in line with EU State aid rules."* The full press release is available [online](#). *(For more information: Arianna Podesta – Tel. +32 229 87024; Giulia Astuti – Tel.: +32 229 55344; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)*

State aid: Commission approves €1 billion Greek scheme providing repayable advances to support the economy in the coronavirus outbreak

The European Commission has approved a €1 billion Greek aid scheme to support companies affected by the coronavirus outbreak. The scheme was approved under the State aid [Temporary Framework](#) adopted by the Commission on 19 March 2020, as [amended on 3 April 2020](#). The scheme is open to companies active in all sectors and applies to the whole territory of Greece. It is targeted at companies having temporary financial difficulties due to the coronavirus outbreak. The scheme will help to ensure that liquidity remains available in the market, to counter the damage inflicted by the outbreak and to preserve the continuity of economic activity during and after the outbreak. Support under this scheme will be granted until 30 June 2020. The Commission found that the Greek measure is in line with the conditions set out in the Temporary Framework. The Commission concluded that the measure is necessary, appropriate and proportionate to remedy a serious disturbance in the economy of a Member State, in line with Article 107(3)(b) TFEU and the conditions set out in the Temporary Framework. On this basis, the Commission approved the measure under EU State aid rules. Executive Vice-President Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said: *"This €1 billion Greek repayable advances scheme will help to ensure there is sufficient liquidity in the Greek economy. It ensures that the companies which are most impacted by the coronavirus outbreak will continue their economic activity during and after the crisis. The European Commission will continue to work closely with the Member States to ensure that national support measures can be put in place in a coordinated and effective*

way, in line with EU rules." The full press release is available [online](#). (For more information: Arianna Podesta – Tel. +32 229 87024; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Coronavirus: EU steps up cooperation in research and innovation to fight the virus

The Commission and EU Member States will coordinate research and innovation activities in the fight against the coronavirus even closer. At a meeting via videoconference on 7 April 2020, EU Research Ministers supported the 'ERAvsCorona' action plan, which rapidly resulted from dialogues between the Commission services and national ministries. Mariya **Gabriel**, Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, said: " *Research and innovation are providing the hope and scientific knowledge we need to combat the coronavirus. To have stronger impact, we need to cooperate even closer across the EU and beyond. I warmly welcome the support ministers gave to the first immediate 'ERAvsCorona' actions. They provide an excellent basis to coordinate, share information and research data, and to fund priority actions. Joining forces will makes us stronger in tackling this virus.*" The action plan contains 10 short-term priority actions to combat the coronavirus, based on an unprecedented joint effort. In particular, EU Member States welcomed the proposed extension of EU-funded clinical trials of therapies, the envisaged interdisciplinary call for innovative solutions on medical and preparedness measures, the possible top-up funding of ongoing calls for innovative small and medium businesses via the European Innovation Council, and a new platform to exchange research data on the coronavirus. More information on the 'ERAvsCorona' action plan will be available [here](#) shortly, as well in a [press release](#) by the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU. The Commission has offered concrete support to [urgently needed research and innovation](#) as part of the [common European response](#) to the outbreak of the coronavirus. (For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Marietta Grammenou – Tel.: +32 229 83583)

Sustainable Finance: Commission launches consultation on Renewed Sustainable Finance Strategy

The European Commission has today launched a [consultation](#) on its Renewed Sustainable Finance Strategy. This is an integral part of the [European Green Deal](#) and the Commission's overall efforts to ensure a sustainable and resilient economic recovery following the coronavirus outbreak. The aim of this consultation is to collect as many views as possible to feed into the Commission's work to help mobilise private investment in sustainable projects. The ongoing coronavirus outbreak highlights the critical need to strengthen the sustainability and resilience of our economies in the future. This renewed strategy will build on previous initiatives and reports, such as the Commission's 2018 [Action Plan on Financing Sustainable Growth](#) and the reports of the [Technical Expert Group on Sustainable Finance](#) (TEG). The Commission's aim is to adopt the Renewed Sustainable Finance Strategy in the second half of 2020. Valdis **Dombrovskis**, Executive Vice-President for an Economy that Works for People said: " *We are currently battling the coronavirus outbreak, but we must not lose sight of our long-term sustainability objectives, including making Europe climate-neutral by 2050. Creating a more sustainable and resilient economy will be a key focus of the recovery phase and the Renewed Sustainable Finance Strategy will be essential to mobilising much-needed capital. This consultation is an opportunity for all Europeans, companies, civil society organisations and public authorities to contribute to the EU's sustainable finance agenda, and how it can contribute to the economic recovery.*" Within the broader context of [the European Green Deal Investment Plan](#), the renewed strategy will aim to: (1) create a strong basis to enable sustainable investment; (2) increase opportunities for citizens, financial institutions and corporates to have a positive impact on society and the environment; and (3) fully manage and integrate climate and environmental risks into the financial system. The consultation will be open until 15 July 2020. The consultation is available online [here](#). (For more information: Daniel Ferrie – Tel.: +32 229 86500; Aikaterini Apostola – Tel.: +32 229 87624)

TRADE: Commission continues its action in support of fair trading conditions for EU steel producers

The Commission today imposed provisional anti-dumping duties on hot-rolled stainless steel coils and sheets from China, Indonesia and Taiwan. The duty rates go from 6% to 18.9% and are set at the level of the dumping margin for Taiwan and at the level of injury margin, i.e. the level necessary to remove economic damage for European producers – in case of exporters from China and Indonesia. The duties will apply for a maximum period of six months, during which the Commission will continue its investigations and decide whether to impose definitive measures. In parallel, the Commission follows also its anti-subsidy investigation on the same set of products. The measures adopted today bring the total number of EU trade defence measures on steel up to 55. The Commission continues defending EU companies against unfair trade and competition from abroad [adjusting its procedures](#) – in

the limit of the EU international obligations under the WTO law – to the current particular circumstances. More information about today's anti-dumping measures can be found in the [EU Official Journal](#). (For more information: Daniel Rosario - Tel.: + 32 229 56185; Kinga Malinowska - Tel.: +32 460 751383)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of sole control over Astaldi by Salini Impregilo

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of sole control over Astaldi S.p.A. ("Astaldi") by Salini Impregilo S.p.A. ("Salini Impregilo"), both of Italy. Astaldi and Impregilo are both general contractors active in the market for construction services on a global scale. Astaldi is active in 10 EU Member States including Italy, Romania and Poland and in other 30 countries outside the European Economic Area (EEA). Salini Impregilo is active in four EU Member States including Italy, Romania and Poland and in 14 countries outside the EEA. The Commission concluded that the proposed transaction 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.9507](#). (For more information: Arianna Podesta – Tel. +32 229 87024; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

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