The Coronavirus Global Response pledging marathon starts on Monday 4 May

With the Coronavirus Global Response, the European Union is joining forces with global partners to kick-start a pledging effort, worldwide. On Monday, 4 May, President von der Leyen will host a global online pledging event at 3pm CET, which you can follow on EbS. The initial goal is to reach €7.5 billion worth of pledges. The money collected will help accelerate the development and deployment of universally available and affordable vaccination, treatment and diagnostics. But €7.5 billion is only the beginning and more will be needed in the future, also to strengthen health systems across the world.

Ahead of the event, European Commission President von der Leyen said: "It is the final countdown for our global pledging marathon. On 4 May, we want to bring the world together to deliver on prevention, diagnostics and treatments against coronavirus. Our objective is to raise money and to launch unprecedented global cooperation between health organisations and all relevant partners. I invite everyone to contribute and join the global response to coronavirus." The pledging event is a response to the 24 April 2020 call for action by a number of global health organisations which came together in the ACT-Accelerator initiative. As of 4 May, the Commission will start registering pledges from countries, international organisations, financial institutions, civil society, private sector and foundations. Citizens can join the Global Response by helping raise awareness or donating to the EU’s partner organisations. The next milestones of the global campaign will be announced on Monday. More information on the global pledging marathon in this press release and on the Coronavirus Global Response website. You can find more information on the Commission's broader response to the coronavirus crisis here. (For more information: Dana Spinant - Tel.: +32 2 299 01 50; Ana Pisonero - Tel.: +32 2 295 43 20)

EU Solidarity Fund: Commission proposes €279 million for Portugal, Spain, Italy and Austria; and receives request from Austria for support in light of coronavirus outbreak

Today, the European Commission is proposing €279 million in financial support for Portugal, Spain, Italy and Austria, to provide relief to the population of several regions in these four countries hit by natural disasters in 2019. This funding comes on top of the €800 million for 2020 available under the EU Solidarity Fund. Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, Elisa Ferreira, said: "We are passing through a period when European solidarity is more important than ever. The EU Solidarity Fund is one of its most concrete expressions. While we are focused on getting us as safely as possible through the coronavirus pandemic, we continue to show solidarity to those who have been hit by other disasters, such as natural disasters that occurred last year. Today’s package will provide the regions affected with much needed funding." The aid package is divided as follows: €211.7 million for Italy, €56.7 million for Spain, €8.2 million for Portugal and €2.3 million for Austria. The Commission's proposal will now go to the European Parliament and the Council for adoption. Once the Commission’s proposal is approved, the financial aid can be paid out. More information is available in this press release. In addition, the Commission received a new request from Austria, requesting support from the EU Solidarity Fund in light of the coronavirus outbreak. It is the second country to submit such a request, following Italy. To recall, the Commission will deal with all applications in one single package, not on a first come first served basis. This ensures that the available resources are being distributed in a fair and equitable manner among all Member States that are hardest-hit by this health emergency. (For more information: Vivian Loonela – Tel.: +32 229 66712; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: +32 229 67094)

Coronavirus: additional €150 million for the European Innovation Council to fund breakthrough ideas

Today, the Commission announced that an additional €150 million will be made available through the European Innovation Council (EIC) Accelerator Pilot to support start-ups and small and medium-sized businesses in developing and deploying innovative solutions for the coronavirus crisis. The additional budget, set out in the revised EIC pilot work programme, is dedicated to companies with coronavirus relevant innovations and comes on top of the €164 million already offered under the latest EIC
Accelerator call. As a result the total budget of this call is almost doubled to allow significant funding towards the fight against the coronavirus outbreak, at the same time as supporting a wide range of other breakthrough innovations. Mariya Gabriel, Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, said: "With the EIC, we aim to be flexible, adaptable and fast, just like the entrepreneurs we serve and support. This response to increase EIC Accelerator funding for coronavirus innovations in just a few weeks shows how fast we can act during times of urgency. It demonstrates our strong support for the top entrepreneurs and companies in their indispensable work in providing solutions against the coronavirus". Companies selected for EIC support will be announced in late May. The Commission will also award special Seals of Excellence to high-quality coronavirus relevant applications that cannot be funded with the extra €150 million, in order to support their financing from other sources. Further details can be found here. This support to start-ups and SMEs is part of the Commission’s coordinated coronavirus response. The Commission is committing hundreds of millions of Euros in research and innovation actions to develop vaccines, new treatments, diagnostic tests and medical systems to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. More information is available here. (For more information: Johannes Bahrke - Tel.: +32 229 58615; Marietta Grammenou - Tel.: +32 229 83583)

Investment Plan for Europe supports €50 million financing agreement with Pluristem to develop coronavirus therapies

Today, the European Investment Bank signed a €50 million financing agreement with Israeli regenerative medicine company Pluristem - through its German subsidiary Pluristem GmbH - to help the company to advance the clinical development of its cell therapies and address a number of severe medical conditions. In particular, it has recently treated several patients with acute respiratory failure due to coronavirus, under the “compassionate use” programme. The company is the first Israeli-European business to benefit from a guarantee by the European Fund for Strategic Investments, the financial pillar of the Investment Plan for Europe. Executive Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis said: "The Investment Plan for Europe has a strong track record of supporting ground-breaking research and development in the health sector. Pluristem is carrying out highly innovative and crucial work in the fight against coronavirus, now boosted by financial backing from the EU.” A press release is available here. As of March 2020, the Investment Plan has mobilised €466 billion of investment across the EU, including €36 billion in Germany, and supported more than 1.14 million start-ups and small and medium-sized businesses.(For more information: Marta Wieczorek – Tel.: +32 229 58197; Siobhán Millbright – Tel.: +32 229 57361)

Coronavirus: Commission intensifies work on all fronts to prevent scams and protect consumers online

Since the start of the coronavirus outbreak, the European Commission has been committed to protecting consumers online. In this context, the Commission has recently started coordinating a screening ('sweep') of online platforms and advertisements to check that consumers in the EU are not being subjected to content promoting false claims or scam products. These checks will be carried out by the Consumer Protection Cooperation Network (CPCNetwork) of national authorities. Didier Reynders, Commissioner for Justice, said: “The Commission is working tirelessly on all fronts to protect European citizens from this deadly virus. This also includes protecting them from malicious operators who are using this pandemic to defraud unwitting consumers online or to unduly obtain high prices. This new sweep, specifically designed for the coronavirus context, should help us identify misleading content in breach of EU consumer rules and lead to their removal.” This week, the Commission has also continued information exchanges with the major online platforms (Allegro, Amazon, AliExpress, Microsoft/Bing, CDiscount, Ebay, Facebook, Google, Rakuten, Wish and Yahoo/Verizon media). Following last week's additional call for action from Commissioner Reynders, all these platforms have replied with a strong commitment to the protection of consumers, and have confirmed their continued efforts to proactively take down misleading ads, including for 'miracle' food supplements illegally advertised with claims related to coronavirus (responses provided to the Commission are available online here). This joint action has already showed good results. For instance, Aliexpress removed over 250,000 suspicious listings alone in March, and eBay blocked or removed more than 15 million listings violating their coronavirus policies. In parallel, the Commission has also been in contact with several trade associations representing key e-commerce and online advertising organisations to guarantee coordinated and efficient actions. All information on how the Commission is working to prevent consumer scams related to coronavirus can be found here. More information on the sweep can be found here. (For more information: Christian Wigand - Tel.: +32 229 62253; Guillaume Mercier - Tel.: +32 229 80564; Katarzyna Kolanko - Tel.:+32 229 6 34 44)
**Coronavirus: Commission proposes extension of time limit for general meetings of “European companies” (SEs) and cooperatives (SCEs)**

The European Commission has adopted a proposal for a temporary and targeted derogation from the rules governing “European Companies (SEs)” and the European Cooperative Society (SCEs). A “European Company” is a type of public limited-liability company, whose status allows to run its business in different European countries using a single set of rules. However, the confinement and social distancing measures applying in the EU make it difficult for SEs and SCEs to organise their general meetings within six months of the end of their financial year, as it is legally required. The temporary derogation from EU rules concerning the general meeting will allow SEs and the SCEs to hold their general meetings within twelve months of the end of the financial year, but no later than 31 December 2020.

Didier Reynders, Commissioner for Justice, and Thierry Breton, Commissioner for Internal Market, said: “We are fully aware of the challenges and the pressure companies across the EU are facing due to the coronavirus pandemic. Extraordinary times call for extraordinary actions. Member States have granted national companies a temporary extension of the time limits to organise their general meetings. We must bear in mind that European Companies and the European Cooperative Societies face similar organisational difficulties. This is why the Commission proposed temporary derogation to help them live up to their legal obligations and weather this acute crisis.” Holding general meetings is critical to ensure that legally required or economically necessary decisions for the company or the cooperative society, shareholders, members and third parties are taken in due time. Given the urgency, this Commission's proposal for Council Regulation will require swift adoption by the Council after the consent of the European Parliament in order to become law, and provide legal certainty as regards the fulfilment of the SEs and SCEs’ obligations. More information on all the other measures to cope with the coronavirus crisis can be found on the Commission’s page on the EU coronavirus response. (For more information: Sonya Gospodinova – Tel. +32 229-66953; Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Guillaume Mercier – Tel.: +32 229 80564; Katarzyna Kolanko – Tel.: +32 229 6 34 44; Célia Defond – Tel.: +32 2 29 88199)

**117 solutions selected at European Hackathon to support recovery from the coronavirus outbreak**

A total of 117 innovative solutions to support recovery from the coronavirus outbreak have been selected as winners of the #EUvsVirus Hackathon that took place last weekend, under the patronage of Mariya Gabriel, Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth. The winning solutions of the hackathon, which was led by the European Innovation Council in close collaboration with the EU Member States, fall under different domains, such as health and life, remote work and education, digital finance and more. They include a data platform powered by artificial intelligence that connects hospitals needs with available suppliers and funds, remote queuing solutions for retailers ensuring social distancing to keep staff and customers safer, an experiential platform that allows parents, teachers and children to connect with peers, an original 'business care' system to help small and medium-sized businesses receive short-term financing to cover their liquidity needs and many other pioneering concepts. Commissioner Gabriel, said: "The #EUvs Virus Hackathon brought together 141 nationalities and many different areas of expertise from across the EU and the world, united in their desire to offer their time, talent, and ideas to help find solutions to the coronavirus crisis. This was just the beginning. With the support of the European Innovation Council and all of the partners involved in the Hackathon, I am looking forward to the transformation of these fantastic ideas into real ventures for the benefit of all citizens.” Over 20,900 people from across the EU and beyond took part in the #EUvsVirus Hackathon and 2,150 solutions were submitted. The winners come from various EU Member States and other countries, representing 141 countries in total. They include one winner for each of the six challenge domain areas, one from each of the 37 challenges and two runners-up for each challenge. The list of winners and prize allocations is available here. Some of the 1,200 partners have pledged a total of over €100,000 to date as cash prizes to the winners. In the next two weeks, the financing and resource needs of the winning teams to develop and scale their ideas, as well as the financing and resources that partners are willing to dedicate, will be gathered. From 22 to 25 May, a ‘Matchathon’ event will take place to match the needs with available resources. Winning solutions will also be invited to join an EIC COVID Platform, which will be launched at the end of May, to facilitate connections with end users, such as hospitals, and provide access to investors, foundations and other funding opportunities from across the EU. More information is available here. (For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Marietta Grammenou – Tel.: +32 229 83583)

**TRADE: Interim appeal arrangement for WTO disputes becomes effective**

Today, the EU and other WTO members have formally notified the ‘Multi-party interim appeal arbitration arrangement’ (MPIA) to the World Trade Organization (WTO). This notification marks the
The European Commission has extended the scope of an ongoing in-depth investigation into Inter IKEA's tax treatment in the Netherlands, which was initially opened on 18 December 2017. The ongoing Commission investigation concerns two tax rulings in favour of Inter IKEA's Dutch subsidiary, Inter IKEA Systems, granted by the Netherlands in 2006 and in 2011. In relation to the 2011 tax ruling, the 2017 Commission opening decision provisionally concluded that the transfer price of the IKEA intellectual property (IP) rights may be too high, enabling Inter IKEA Systems to pay less tax and giving them an unfair advantage over other companies, in breach of EU State aid rules. Following the opening of the in-depth investigation, some of the facts and assumptions underlying the 2011 tax ruling have changed. In particular, Inter IKEA Systems has started to amortise the IKEA IP rights. The Dutch tax authorities confirmed the deduction of such amortisation in their annual tax assessments of Inter IKEA Systems' tax returns. In today's decision, the Commission extends the scope of its
investigation to the annual tax assessments in order to examine whether the deduction of the amortisation of the IKEA IP rights provided an advantage to Inter IKEA Systems, in breach of EU State aid rules. The non-confidential versions of the decisions will be made available under the case number SA.46470 in the State Aid Register on the Commission's competition website once any confidentiality issues have been resolved. (Pour plus d'informations: Arianna Podesta – Tél. +32 229 87024; Giulia Astuti – Tél.: +32 229 55344; Maria Tsoni – Tél.: +32 229 90526)

**State aid: Commission opens in-depth investigation into Belgian aid scheme to support videogame production**

The Commission has opened an in-depth investigation to assess whether a Belgian aid scheme to support videogame production is in line with EU State aid rules. In 2014, the Commission approved a Belgian “tax shelter” scheme to support film production. Under the existing scheme, undertakings which are taxable in Belgium and invest in film production are entitled to a tax advantage, subject to certain territorial spending conditions. Belgium has decided to extend the support provided under the existing scheme on funding of film production to also apply to funding of videogame production. By extending the scheme, Belgium intends to apply the same conditions to videogame production, including the territorial spending conditions. However, the imposition of territorial spending conditions is exceptionally allowed under the Commission Communication on State aid for films and other audiovisual works due to the specificities of film production, which is by nature very mobile. Furthermore, the Communication recognises a need to maintain a critical mass of infrastructure for film production in each Member State. This exception has to be interpreted narrowly. At this stage, the Commission has doubts that the application of such an exception can be justified with respect to videogames. The opening of an in-depth investigation gives Belgium and interested third parties the opportunity to submit comments. It does not prejudge the outcome of the investigation. More information will be available on the Commission's competition website, in the State aid Register under case number SA.54817. (For more information: Arianna Podesta – Tel. +32 229 87024; Giulia Astuti – Tel.: +32 229 55344)

**Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of control over IQSA Holdings by Blackstone**

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of control over IQSA Holdings S.à r.l. of the UK by The Blackstone Group Inc. (“Blackstone”) of the U.S. IQSA Holdings owns a portfolio of corporate purpose built student accommodation (“Corporate PBSA”) throughout the UK, which operates as iQ Student Accommodation. It also owns a private residential development in Sheffield, the Pendulum Hotel located in Manchester and ten development sites it intends to operate as Corporate PBSA schemes. Blackstone is a global asset manager with a portfolio of assets including real estate assets located across Asia, Europe, South America and the US. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, because of its limited impact on the market. 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.9813. (For more information: Arianna Podesta – Tel. +32 229 87024; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

**Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of joint control over Inexio and DGF by EFMS and OMERS**

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of joint control by EQT Fund Management (“EFMS”) of Luxembourg and OMERS Infrastructure European Holdings 2 B.V. (“OMERS”) of the Netherlands, controlled by OMERS Administration Corporation of Canada over the whole of (i) Inexio Beteiligungs GmbH & Co. KGaA and Inexio Beteiligungs Geschäftsführungs GmbH and their subsidiaries (“Inexio”), of Germany, solely controlled by EQT Infrastructure IV of Luxembourg and (ii) the Deutsche Glasfaser Group (“DGF”) of Germany, currently controlled by Goethe Acquisition Gmbh of Germany. Inexio is active in the provision of fixed internet access services, fibre optic network services, cloud technology and hosting solutions for business-to-consumers (“B2C”) and business-to-business (“B2B”) customers in Germany. DGF is active in the provision of B2C and B2B fixed internet access services in Germany and the provision of internet protocol television. EFMS controls EQT Infrastructure IV through which it engages in investment activities in infrastructure and infrastructure related assets and businesses primarily in Europe and North America. OMERS is active in the investment and administration of pensions for active, deferred and retired employees of municipalities, school boards, libraries, police departments and other local agencies in Ontario. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, because of the companies’ moderate combined market positions resulting from
the proposed transaction. 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.9783. (For more information: Arianna Podesta – Tel. +32 229 87024; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Legg Mason by Franklin Resources

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of Legg Mason, INC. by Franklin Resources, INC., both of the U.S.. Legg Mason provides investment management and related products and services to institutional and individual clients. Franklin Resources is active in investment management and related services to retail, institutional and high-net-worth investors. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, given the moderate combined market positions resulting from the acquisition. 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.9811. (For more information: Arianna Podesta – Tel. +32 229 87024; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Déclaration du commissaire Schmit à la veille de la Journée internationale des travailleurs

A la veille de la Journée internationale des travailleurs, le 1er mai, le commissaire à l'emploi et aux droits sociaux, Nicolas Schmit, a fait la déclaration suivante : « Demain, nous célébrons la Journée internationale des travailleurs, également connue sous le nom de « Fête du travail ». Cette année, les célébrations revêtent une importance toute particulière, car elles seront pour nous l'occasion de remercier ceux qui travaillent au bénéfice de tous en cette période hors du commun. Nous rendons hommage aux milliers de travailleurs qui, dans toute l'Union, se trouvent en première ligne, tels que les professionnels de la santé, les secouristes, les prestataires de soins, les ouvriers d'usine, les caissiers des supermarchés, les agents de nettoyage et les éboueurs, pour l'abnégation dont ils font preuve afin d'assurer la protection et le bien-être d'autrui pendant cette pandémie de coronavirus. Je remercie tout particulièrement les femmes qui représentent l'immense majorité des travailleurs dans les secteurs de la santé et de l'aide sociale en première ligne, qui, trop souvent, ne sont pas reconnus à leur juste valeur. [...] L'Union a déjà pris des mesures pour protéger les personnes les plus exposées au risque de voir leurs conditions sociales et d'emploi se dégrader en cette période difficile. De nouvelles initiatives de l'Union apporteront un soutien aux mesures de lutte contre la pandémie de COVID-19 dans les États membres de l'UE et fourniront une aide financière aux dispositifs de chômage partiel dans l'ensemble de l'UE. Nous avons également publié, récemment, des orientations visant à garantir, au moyen de lignes directrices en matière de santé et de sécurité, la libre circulation des travailleurs exerçant des professions critiques et le retour sans risque sur le lieu de travail dès que la propagation du coronavirus aura ralenti. » La déclaration est disponible en ligne en anglais, en français et en allemand. (Pour plus d’informations: Marta Wieczorek – Tél.: +32 229 58197; Siobhán Millbright – Tél.: +32 229 57361)