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Coronavirus response: €511 million from EU Cohesion policy to support Bulgarian economy

The Commission has approved an amendment to the Bulgarian Operational Programme 'Innovation and Competitiveness', allowing the mobilisation of €511 million from the [European Regional Development Fund](#) and the [Cohesion Fund](#) to help Bulgarian economy in dealing with the adverse effects of the coronavirus crisis. This financial support includes grants for working capital to micro, small and medium sized enterprises, equity investments and loan guarantees. Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, Elisa **Ferreira**, said: "*Bulgaria was one of the first Member States to take advantage of the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative. These measures have a short-term objective of crisis relief but Bulgaria will also continue to benefit from additional EU support for crisis repair to allow its economic recovery*". Modifying this programme is possible thanks to the exceptional flexibility provided under the [Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative](#) (CRII) and [Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus](#) (CRII+), which allows Member States to use Cohesion policy funding to support the most exposed sectors to the pandemic, such as healthcare, SMEs and labour markets. Further details are available [here](#) and on the dedicated [Coronavirus Dashboard](#). (For more information: Vivian Loonela - Tel.: +32 229 66712; Veronica Favalli - Tel.: +32 229 87269)

Coronavirus response: almost €737 million to support Calabria, Liguria and Emilia Romagna regions in Italy

The European Commission has approved the modification of three new EU Cohesion policy operational programmes in Italy allowing Calabria, Liguria and Emilia Romagna regions to redirect almost €737 million of cohesion policy funds to respond to the coronavirus pandemic by supporting the health and socio-economic sectors. Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, Elisa **Ferreira**, said: "*I am very pleased to see that almost all Italian regions have taken advantage of the cohesion policy flexibility to redirect the funds to where they are most needed in these difficult times. This will significantly help the country to address the challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic both in the short and the long run.*" Calabria's programme amendment (€500 million) will use the flexibility to strengthen the crisis response capacity of the health sector, support SMEs, boost employment and e-learning. This modification also includes a temporary increase in the EU co-financing rate to 100% for eligible actions, thus helping the region to overcome liquidity scarcity. Liguria (€46.9 million) will strengthen the health system, support SMEs with grants, working capital and additional guarantees via the national Guarantee Fund. Finally, in addition to a [previous programme modification](#), Emilia Romagna's programme amendment (€190 million) will improve the response of the health sector, by providing personal protection and medical equipment and testing capacity. Modifying these three programmes is possible thanks to the exceptional flexibility provided under the [Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative](#) (CRII) and [Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus](#) (CRII+), which allows Member States to use Cohesion policy funding to support the most exposed sectors to the pandemic. Further details are available [here](#). (For more information: Vivian Loonela - Tel.: +32 229 66712; Veronica Favalli - Tel.: +32 229 87269)

EU and Australian leaders commit to strengthen cooperation on the coronavirus recovery, bilateral relations and global challenges

Today, the President of the European Commission, Ursula **von der Leyen**, the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, and the Prime Minister of Australia, Scott Morrison, held a videoconference call. Building on the close relationship between the EU and Australia, which was formalised through a bilateral [Framework Agreement](#) in 2017, the leaders reconfirmed their determination to work together to tackle the coronavirus pandemic, including the development and provision of affordable vaccines and the support of the World Health Organisation. They committed to step up cooperation on the post-pandemic socio-economic recovery, tackling the urgent challenge of

climate change and accelerating the digital transformation. The leaders noted good progress in the ongoing negotiations for an [EU-Australia Trade Agreement](#). They also discussed international developments including in Asia and the Pacific as well as cooperation in international organisations. The leaders also recognised the importance of further engaging with ASEAN. More information is available on the [joint press release](#), on the dedicated [factsheet on the EU-Australia relations](#) and on the [website of the EU Delegation in Canberra](#). (For more information: Eric Mamer – Tel.: +32 229 94073; Nabila Massrali – Tel.: +32 229 88093)

Commission announces winners of the 2020 European Social Innovation Competition

Today, the Commission announced the winners of the 2020 [European Social Innovation Competition](#), a challenge prize run across all EU countries and [Horizon 2020 associated countries](#) calling on innovative solutions to problems affecting our society. The three projects, selected for addressing this year's challenge 'reimagine fashion' in the best way, will receive a prize of €50,000 each. The winning participants are the following: a Belgian start-up that helps simplify the process of reusing and recycling textiles, [resortecs®](#); a Croatian digital platform that enables users to wear outfits in augmented reality, [Snake](#); and a Romanian legal support mechanism for craftspeople and designers, [WhyWeCraft: Cultural Sustainability in Fashion](#). In addition, every year the jury awards an Impact Prize to one of the participants who reached the semi-finals in the previous year's competition, based on results that the project achieved over the past twelve months. The 2020 winner is [Empower](#), a company that adopted a new technology to enable circular economy, by allowing the deposit and collection of plastic waste for financial reward. More information on the competition: [here](#). (For more information: Sonya Gospodinova – Tel.: +32 229 66953; Federica Miccoli – Tel.: +32 229 58300)

European Social Fund supports zero-interest student loans for Southern Italy

The StudioSì Fund, launched by the Italian Ministry for University and Research and managed by the EIB, has awarded its first €2 million in zero-interest loans to students. The Fund benefits from a €100 million allocation of the [European Social Fund](#) (ESF), Europe's main instrument for supporting jobs and promoting social inclusion in the EU. Thanks to this contribution, StudioSì will be able to cover students' tuition and living costs and thus support access to higher education and professional opportunities, notably for lower income families. Nicolas **Schmit**, Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, said: "We have a collective duty to provide our young people with the tools they need to thrive. With €100 million available from the European Social Fund we can make higher education accessible for so many students in Southern Italy. The zero-interest loans from the StudioSì Fund will allow these students to engage in their studies and careers with greater confidence and financial security. In today's uncertain times, this is particularly welcome." 75% of this Fund will support students from Southern Italy to pursue their higher education, while 25% of the resources will support students from across the EU who want to study in Southern Italian universities. With its regional focus, StudioSì can also help improve the contribution of universities to regional development in a sustainable way. The press release is available [here](#). (For more information: Marta Wiczorek – Tel.: +32 229 58197; Flora Matthaes – Tel.: +32 229 83951)

The Commission's Joint Research Centre proposes a new framework to raise awareness and resilience against hybrid threats

The Commission has today presented a new conceptual framework, proposed by researchers, to improve the understanding of modern hybrid threats, and to increase EU resilience against them. The framework was developed by the Commission's Joint Research Centre and the Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats. It describes the different components of hybrid threats, shedding light on the actors, as well as their objectives and tools. The research teams call for a whole-of-society approach, which brings together all civil, military and political actors for a more effective response to hybrid threats. Speaking during the launch event of the conceptual framework, Mariya **Gabriel**, Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, said: "The EU has the capacities and know-how to build its resilience against hybrid threats. But we need to understand the problem in depth to be able to design an effective response. It is our advantage that we ground our policy actions on science. The conceptual framework is an instrumental part of this process. It provides a comprehensive description of hybrid threats, actors and the tools that can be used against EU countries." Further information is available [here](#). (For more information: Susanne Conze – Tel.: +32 229 80236; Sinéad Meehan-van Druten - Tel.: +32 229 84094)

Des médicaments abordables, accessibles et sûrs pour tous : la Commission présente une Stratégie pharmaceutique pour l'Europe

La Commission a adopté hier une [Stratégie pharmaceutique pour l'Europe](#) afin de garantir aux patients l'accès à des médicaments innovants et abordables et de soutenir la compétitivité, la capacité d'innovation et la durabilité de l'industrie pharmaceutique de l'UE. La stratégie permettra à l'Europe de couvrir ses besoins pharmaceutiques, y compris en période de crise, au moyen de chaînes d'approvisionnement solides. Cette stratégie, qui constitue une composante essentielle de la mise en place d'une Union européenne de la santé plus forte que la présidente **von der Leyen** a appelée de ses vœux dans son [discours sur l'état de l'Union](#), contribuera à l'instauration d'un système pharmaceutique de l'UE qui résiste à l'épreuve du temps et aux crises. Davantage d'informations sont disponibles en ligne : [communiqué de presse](#), [questions-réponses](#), [discours](#) et [fiche d'information](#). La conférence de presse avec le vice-président **Schinas** et la commissaire **Kyriakides** est disponible [ici](#). (For more information: Stefan De Keersmaecker – Tél.: +32 229 84680; Darragh Cassidy – Tél.: +32 229 83978; Stephan Meder – Tél.: +32 229 13917)

State aid: the Commission approves tender mechanism to compensate for the early closure of hard coal fired generation in Germany

The European Commission found that a competitive tender mechanism introduced by Germany to compensate hard coal-fired power plants for phasing out earlier than foreseen promotes European Union climate objectives and is in line with State aid rules. According to the German coal phase out law, the use of coal for the production of electricity will have to phase-out by 2038. Germany has decided to encourage the early closure of hard coal-fired power plants via a shutdown premium awarded through a competitive tender mechanism. This mechanism will also ensure an orderly closure of coal fired-plants, in order to guarantee the energy security of supply in Germany. The German energy regulator will publish seven tenders between 2020 and 2023, for closures of hard coal-fired and small lignite-fired (below 150 MW) power plants that will take place annually until 2026. The winners of the tenders will be determined by the energy regulator on the basis of transparent selection criteria. The design of the tender mechanism should allow Germany to eliminate the highest amount of CO2 emissions from the market at the lowest cost, whilst avoiding the closure of those power plants that are essential for network stability. In its decision, the Commission does not take a final position on whether the measure provides the operator with an advantage over its competitors, and whether it thus constitutes State aid. At the same time, the Commission assessed the compatibility of the measure under Article 107(3)(c) TFEU and concluded that the measure would in any event be compatible with the EU's Single Market. The Commission concluded that the contribution to EU environmental and climate goals of the measure outweighs any potential distortion of competition and trade brought about by the support. On this basis, the Commission approved the measure under EU State aid rules. Executive Vice-President Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said: "*Phasing out hard coal-fired power plants contributes in a crucial way to the transformation to a climate-neutral economy, in line with the European Green Deal objectives. Germany's plans to provide incentives for the early closure of such plants and to compensate the businesses that leave the market early via competitive tenders are in line with EU State aid rules. That's because competitive tenders are an effective tool to ensure that the compensation is kept to the minimum needed and ultimately to avoid an undue distortion of competition in the EU's Single Market*". The full press release is available [online](#). (For more information: Arianna Podesta – Tel. +32 229 87024; Giulia Astuti – Tel.: +32 229 55344)

State aid: Commission approves Austrian measures to support rail freight and passenger operators affected by the coronavirus outbreak

The European Commission has approved, under EU State aid rules, two Austrian measures supporting the rail freight sector and one measure supporting the rail passenger sector in the context of the coronavirus outbreak. The two measures supporting the rail freight sector will ensure increased public support to further encourage the shift of freight traffic from road to rail, and the third measure introduces temporary relief for rail operators providing passenger services on a commercial basis. The Commission found that the measures are beneficial for the environment and for mobility as they support rail transport, which is less polluting than road transport, while also decreasing road congestion. The Commission also found that the measures are proportionate and necessary to achieve the objective pursued, namely to support the modal shift from road to rail whilst not leading to undue competition distortions. Finally, the waiver of infrastructure access charges provided for in the second and third measures described above is in line with the recently adopted Regulation (EU) 2020/1429. This Regulation allows and encourages Member States to temporarily authorise the reduction, waiver or deferral of charges for accessing rail infrastructure below direct costs. As a

result, the Commission concluded that the measures comply with EU State aid rules, in particular the [2008 Commission Guidelines on State aid for railway undertakings](#) ("the Railway Guidelines"). Executive Vice-President Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said: "*The measures approved today will enable the Austrian authorities to support not only rail freight transport operators, but also commercial passenger operators in the context of the coronavirus outbreak. This will contribute to maintaining their competitiveness compared to other modes of transport, in line with the EU Green Deal objective. We continue working with all Member States to ensure that national support measures can be put in place as quickly and effectively as possible, in line with EU 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 €5.5 million Estonian scheme to support companies active in tourism sector affected by coronavirus outbreak

The European Commission has approved a €5.5 million Estonian scheme to support companies active in the tourism sector affected by the coronavirus outbreak. The measure was approved under the State aid [Temporary Framework](#). The public support will take the form of direct grants and will be open to accommodation providers, travel agencies, tourism attraction operators, tourism service providers, international coach service providers, conference organisers and tourist guides. The purpose of the measure is to mitigate the sudden liquidity shortages that these companies are facing because of the restrictive measures imposed by the government to limit the spread of the virus. The Commission found that the Estonian measure is in line with the conditions set out in the Temporary Framework. In particular, the support (i) will not exceed €800,000 per company; and (ii) will be granted no later than 30 June 2021. 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 of the Temporary Framework. On this basis, the Commission approved the measure under EU State aid rules. More information on the Temporary Framework and other actions taken by the Commission to address the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic can be found [here](#). The non-confidential version of the decision will be made available under the case number SA.59338 in the [State aid register](#) on the Commission's [competition](#) website once any confidentiality issues have been resolved. (For more information: Arianna Podesta – Tel. +32 229 87024; Giulia Astuti – Tel.: +32 229 55344; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Concentrations : la Commission autorise l'acquisition d'un bien immobilier par SEGRO et Public Sector Pension Investment Board

La Commission européenne a approuvé, en vertu du règlement européen sur les concentrations, l'acquisition du contrôle conjoint d'un bien immobilier situé à Gonesse en France, par SEGRO plc, basée au Royaume-Uni, et Public Sector Pension Investment Board, basée au Canada. SEGRO détient, développe ou gère des actifs immobiliers situés en zone urbaine et à proximité des axes de transport, plus particulièrement en France, en Italie et au Royaume-Uni. Public Sector Pension Investment Board est un gestionnaire de fonds pour des régimes de pension au Canada. La Commission a conclu que la concentration envisagée ne soulèverait pas de problèmes de concurrence notamment dans la mesure où la position des entreprises concernées est limitée sur les marchés concernés. La transaction a été examinée dans le cadre de la procédure simplifiée de contrôle des concentrations. De plus amples informations sont disponibles sur [le site internet concurrence](#) de la Commission, dans [le registre public](#) des affaires sous le numéro d'affaire [M.9988](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Arianna Podesta – Tél. +32 229 87024; Maria Tsoni – Tél.: +32 229 90526)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Netinera Deutschland by Trenitalia

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of sole control over Netinera Deutschland GmbH ('Netinera') of Germany by Trenitalia S.p.A ('Trenitalia') of Italy. Netinera operates regional rail and bus passenger services mainly in Germany and, to a lesser extent, in the Czech Republic, on the basis of public service contracts awarded mainly by the German Public Transport Authorities (PTAs). Netinera is currently jointly controlled by Trenitalia and Cube Transport Sarl, an investment fund incorporated in Luxembourg specialised in infrastructure and public services. Trenitalia is active in local, long distance and international rail passenger transport and related services in Italy and other European countries, mainly France, Greece and UK. It is wholly owned by Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane S.p.A. which is itself 100% owned by the Italian Ministry of Economy and Finance. 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.9996](#). (For more information: Arianna Podesta – Tel. +32 229 87024; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Simplification législative : la Commission accueille la première session plénière de la plateforme « Prêts pour l'avenir »

Aujourd'hui, Maroš **Šefčovič**, vice-président chargé des relations interinstitutionnelles et de la prospective, présidera la première réunion plénière de la plateforme « [Prêts pour l'avenir](#) », un groupe d'experts de haut niveau qui aide la Commission à mettre en œuvre son [programme pour une réglementation affûtée et performante](#). L'objectif est de simplifier la législation de l'UE tout en veillant à ce qu'elles produisent les avantages escomptés. Lors de leur première réunion, les membres débattront de leur programme de travail pour 2021, en tenant compte des éléments probants tirés des principales évaluations et analyses d'impact tant du programme de travail de la Commission pour 2021 que des parties prenantes et des bénéficiaires du droit de l'UE sur le terrain. Une fois le programme de travail de la plateforme établi, les citoyens pourront contribuer en ligne via « [Donnez votre avis : simplifier !](#) », a déclaré le vice-président **Šefčovič**: « *La Commission est déterminée à veiller à ce que le corpus législatif de l'UE reste adapté à sa finalité, à jour et aussi simple que possible. Nous voulons faire en sorte que nos citoyens, nos entreprises, les petits entrepreneurs et les administrations publiques bénéficient de lois simples et efficaces qui produisent des résultats efficaces et à moindre coût. La plateforme « Prêts pour l'avenir » soutiendra nos efforts en matière de réglementation, afin de veiller à ce que notre législation soit à l'épreuve du temps, plus numérique et mieux placée pour relever les défis futurs.* » Le discours de vice-président Šefčovič lors de la réunion de la plateforme sera bientôt publié [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Susanne Conze - Tél.: + 32 229 80236; Sinéad Meehan - van Druten – Tél.: + 32 229 84094)

Commissioners Schmit and Johansson participate in Mutual Learning Conference on integration and inclusion of migrants

Today the Mutual Learning Conference on '[Innovative approaches to integration and inclusion of migrants](#)' takes place by VTC with the participation of the Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, Nicolas **Schmit**, and the Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva **Johansson**. It follows the Commission's [Action Plan on Integration and Inclusion for the period 2021-2027](#) published on 24 November, laying the foundation for strategic guidance and concrete actions to foster the inclusion of migrants and EU citizens with migrant background, which is essential for social cohesion and for a dynamic economy that works for all. As part of a series of mutual learning events organised by the Commission, the conference presents an opportunity to exchange innovative practices, with a focus on skills assessment and development, as well as on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the labour market integration and social inclusion of migrants and EU citizens with migrant background. Many of them are essential workers and help to fill skills gaps in various sectors, however, they often encounter obstacles to accessing the labour market and social protection systems. The conference gathers around 160 policy experts from national administrations, representatives of civil society, the Commission and economic and social partner organisations, who provide an overview of new approaches to integration and inclusion. Information material linked to the conference, thematic reports and its final report will be published [here](#). (For more information: Marta Wieczorek – Tel.: +32 229 58197; Adalbert Jahnz – Tel.: +32 229 53156)

Vice-President Schinas to discuss 'European Way of Life' with religious leaders

Tomorrow, on 27 November, Vice-President Margaritis **Schinas** will host the 15th annual high-level meeting with religious leaders organized by the Commission. The theme of the meeting which will gather eight representatives of religious organisations from across Europe will be 'the European way of life'. The meeting will look at how the current crisis may have affected and challenged this way of life and the responses to these challenges. The meeting will also address other recent developments such as the Migration and Asylum Pact, Inclusion and Integration as well as progress towards an EU Health Union. Since 2009, the dialogue with churches, religions, philosophical and non-confessional

organisations is enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty (Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union). The press conference of Vice-President **Schinus** with European Parliament Vice-President Roberta Metsola and religious leaders will take place tomorrow at 12:00 and will be streamed live on [EbS](#). More information is available [online](#). (*For more information: Christian Wigand - Tel.: +32 229 62253; Katarzyna Kolanko - Tel.: +32 229 63444; Jördis Ferrolí - Tel.: +32 229 92729*)

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