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Brussels, 24 March 2021

COLLEGE MEETING: Commission strengthens transparency and authorisation mechanism for exports of COVID-19 vaccines

Today, the European Commission has introduced the principles of reciprocity and proportionality as new criteria to be considered for authorising exports under the transparency and authorisation mechanism for COVID-19 vaccine exports. This system has significantly improved the transparency of exports. Nevertheless, the objective to ensure timely access to COVID-19 vaccines for EU citizens is still not met. President of the European Commission, Ursula **von der Leyen**, said: *"The EU is proud to be the home of vaccine producers who not only deliver to EU citizens but export across the globe. While our Member States are facing the third wave of the pandemic and not every company is delivering on its contract, the EU is the only major OECD producer that continues to export vaccines at large scale to dozens of countries. But open roads should run in both directions. This is why the European Commission will introduce the principles of reciprocity and proportionality into the EU's existing authorisation mechanism. The EU has an excellent portfolio of different vaccines and we have secured more than enough doses for the entire population. But we have to ensure timely and sufficient vaccine deliveries to EU citizens. Every day counts."* More information is available [here](#). (For more information: Miriam Garcia Ferrer – Tel.: +32 229 99075; Sophie Dirven – Tel.: +32 229 67228)

Coronavirus: une nouvelle procédure pour faciliter et accélérer l'approbation de vaccins adaptés contre les variants de la COVID-19

Dans le cadre d'une action immédiate au titre de l'[incubateur HERA](#), le nouveau plan européen de préparation en matière de biodéfense contre les variants du SARS-CoV-2, la Commission prend aujourd'hui une mesure visant à accélérer l'autorisation des vaccins contre la COVID-19 qui ont été adaptés. Elle introduira des dispositions dans la législation pertinente de l'Union afin de permettre aux entreprises de se concentrer sur la collecte des éléments de preuve nécessaires en temps utile et de rendre possible l'autorisation des vaccins qui ont été adaptés sur la base d'un ensemble plus restreint de données supplémentaires soumises à l'Agence européenne des médicaments (EMA). La présidente de la Commission européenne, Ursula **von der Leyen**, a déclaré : « *L'incubateur HERA vise à renforcer et à accélérer la réaction de l'UE face aux variants. Nous permettons à l'EMA d'accélérer l'approbation réglementaire des vaccins adaptés afin de faire face aux nouveaux variants. Une approbation plus rapide, cela veut dire plus de vaccins en circulation et plus d'Européens protégés contre le virus.* » Stella **Kyriakides**, commissaire à la santé et à la sécurité alimentaire, s'est exprimée en ces termes : « *Nous devons être prêts à adapter les vaccins aussi rapidement que possible pour faire face à de nouveaux variants potentiellement résistants à la vaccination. Aujourd'hui, nous proposons des solutions rapides et flexibles permettant des approbations accélérées, sans remettre en cause la sécurité et l'efficacité. Avec l'incubateur HERA, notre objectif est d'anticiper et d'avoir une longueur d'avance.* » Un [communiqué de presse](#) est disponible en ligne. (Pour plus d'informations: Stefan De Keersmaecker – Tél.: +32 229 84680; Darragh Cassidy – Tél.: +32 229 83978)

Budget de l'UE: La Commission propose un financement supplémentaire pour lutter contre la COVID-19 et ses conséquences

La Commission européenne a proposé aujourd'hui une enveloppe supplémentaire de 345,2 millions d'euros provenant du budget de l'UE pour financer des initiatives déjà annoncées et de nouvelles initiatives liées au coronavirus en 2021. Les fonds aideront à répondre aux besoins immédiats et renforceront la prévention. Il s'agit notamment de mettre en place le [certificat vert numérique](#) pour permettre la libre circulation dans l'ensemble de l'UE; de renforcer la surveillance des eaux usées et d'améliorer la capacité de séquençage des variants du [coronavirus](#) par l'intermédiaire de l'[incubateur HERA](#) (Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority). Dans le cadre de ces fonds, un

montant de 100 millions d'euros sera mis à disposition pour faire face à d'éventuelles initiatives urgentes liées à la COVID-19. Johannes **Hahn**, commissaire chargé du budget et de l'administration, a déclaré à ce propos : « *Le financement supplémentaire nous permettra de trouver de meilleures réponses pour surmonter la crise actuelle et de réagir rapidement aux besoins émergents au niveau européen.* » Pour financer ces activités, la Commission renforce l'instrument d'aide d'urgence (ESI) ainsi que la contribution de l'UE au Centre européen de prévention et de contrôle des maladies (ECDC). Les fonds proviendront de la réserve de solidarité et d'aide d'urgence de l'UE, qui est destinée à aider les États membres et les pays tiers dans les situations d'urgence, et du deuxième projet de budget rectificatif en 2021. La disponibilité de ces fonds est subordonnée à l'accord du Parlement européen et du Conseil. (Pour plus d'informations: Balazs Ujvari — Tél.: + 32 460 760296; Claire Joawn — Tél.: + 32 460 756859)

La Commission lance une plateforme de publication en libre accès pour les articles scientifiques

La Commission européenne a lancé aujourd'hui [Open Research Europe](#), une plateforme de publication d'articles scientifiques qui sera accessible à tous. La plateforme présentera les résultats des travaux de recherche financés par [Horizon Europe](#), le programme de recherche et d'innovation de l'UE pour la période 2021-2027, et par son prédécesseur, Horizon 2020. Open Research Europe offrira aux chercheurs et citoyens un accès gratuit aux plus récentes découvertes scientifiques. Cette plateforme apporte une solution directe aux difficultés souvent liées à la publication des résultats scientifiques, notamment les retards, les obstacles à la réutilisation des résultats et les coûts très élevés. Il s'agit d'un service facultatif, sans frais, offert aux bénéficiaires d'Horizon Europe et d'Horizon 2020, afin qu'ils puissent répondre aux exigences de financement de permettre un accès immédiat à leurs résultats. Environ 40 articles scientifiques portant sur des domaines de recherche très variés ont déjà été soumis et peuvent être consultés par la communauté scientifique. Mariya **Gabriel**, commissaire à l'innovation, à la recherche, à la culture, à l'éducation et à la jeunesse, a déclaré : « *Nous devons accélérer le progrès scientifique en profitant des pratiques de recherche plus collaboratives et plus ouvertes. En aidant les chercheurs à publier en libre accès, Open Research Europe supprime les obstacles aux flux de connaissance et favorise le débat scientifique. Ce n'est que le début. Nous construirons progressivement la réputation de la plateforme en tant que lieu de publication privilégié pour les chercheurs d'Horizon 2020 et d'Horizon Europe, et nous veillerons à ce qu'elle soit solidement intégrée dans l'Espace européen de la recherche.* » Plus d'informations sont disponibles dans ce [communiqué de presse](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Johannes Bahrke – Tél.: +32 229 58615; Marietta Grammenou – Tél.: +32 229 83583)

Commission goes to the market for the sixth time under SURE, raises further €13 billion amid strong demand

The Commission has today raised further €13 billion in the sixth borrowing operation under the SURE instrument, to help protect jobs and people in work. The issuing consisted of two bonds, with €8 billion due for repayment in March 2026 and €5 billion due for repayment in May 2046. The bonds attracted a strong demand from a wide range of investors, which ensured good pricing conditions that the Commission is directly passing on to the beneficiary Member States. Commissioner Johannes **Hahn**, in charge of Budget and Administration said: "*This second SURE transaction for this month and the sixth one since the start of the programme has once again attracted a strong interest by the market. We have obtained favourable pricing for the beneficiary EU Member States and their citizens. This is a good illustration of EU added value at times of pandemic and yet another encouraging message in the run-up to the borrowing under NextGenerationEU later this year.*" The 5-year bond was priced at a negative yield of -0.488% whereas the 25-year bond was priced slightly positively, at 0.476%. (See [here](#) for more details on the pricing of the transaction). With this third borrowing operation for the first quarter of the year, the Commission has raised a total of €36 billion between January and March 2021, in line with its original estimates. So far, the Commission has raised a total of €75.5 billion, with further €13-€14 billion scheduled for the second quarter of 2021. Sixteen EU Member States have so far received funding under SURE. At the moment, a total of 19 Member States are foreseen to receive €90.6 under this instrument whose firepower is up to €100 billion. Member States are therefore still entitled to submit requests for financial support up to SURE's full volume. Later this year, the Commission is due to also launch the borrowing under NextGenerationEU, the recovery instrument of €750 billion (in 2018 prices or some €800 billion in current prices) to help build a greener, more digital and more resilient Europe. (For more information: Balazs Ujvari - Tel.: +32 229 54578; Claire Joawn - Tel.: +32 229 56859)

Lutte contre le terrorisme : La Commission lance une consultation publique sur l'évaluation des règles de l'UE en matière de lutte contre le terrorisme

La Commission lance aujourd'hui une [consultation publique](#) visant à éclairer l'évaluation en cours des règles de l'UE en matière de lutte contre le terrorisme. La Commission évalue actuellement la [directive relative à la lutte contre le terrorisme](#) et si elle est adaptée aux buts visés, après les trois premières années de son application. Les pouvoirs publics, les organisations de la société civile, les citoyens et les autres parties prenantes concernées sont invités à contribuer à la consultation publique jusqu'au 16 juin. L'évaluation porte sur la pertinence, l'efficacité, l'efficience et la cohérence des règles, sur la manière de renforcer leur valeur ajoutée européenne, ainsi que sur l'incidence des règles sur les libertés et droits fondamentaux, l'état de droit et la protection et l'assistance aux victimes du terrorisme. La Commission prévoit de présenter son évaluation d'ici la fin de 2021. La directive est un élément essentiel de la lutte de l'UE contre le terrorisme: elle criminalise et sanctionne les infractions liées au terrorisme, telles que le fait de se rendre à l'étranger pour commettre une infraction terroriste, de retourner dans l'UE ou de se déplacer à l'intérieur de l'UE pour de telles activités, l'entraînement à des fins terroristes et le financement du terrorisme. La directive prévoit également des dispositions spéciales pour les victimes du terrorisme, en veillant à ce qu'elles aient accès à des informations fiables ainsi qu'à des services de soutien professionnels et spécialisés, immédiatement après un attentat et aussi longtemps que nécessaire. La lutte contre le terrorisme est une priorité pour la Commission. En décembre 2020, la Commission a présenté un nouveau [programme de lutte contre le terrorisme](#) pour l'UE visant à intensifier la lutte contre le terrorisme et l'extrémisme violent et à renforcer la résilience de l'UE face aux menaces terroristes. La commissaire chargée des affaires intérieures, Ylva **Johansson**, a publié aujourd'hui un [article de blog](#) qui encourage toutes les parties intéressées à contribuer à la consultation publique. (Pour plus d'informations : Adalbert Jahnz — tél. : + 32 229 53156; Ciara Bottomley — Tél. : + 32 229 69971; Laura Bérard — Tél. : + 32 229 55721)

Coronavirus: more online risks for children and more digital skills for parents to mitigate them

Children learning remotely report that they face negative online content, such as cyberbullying or exposure to inappropriate material, more often than before the pandemic, according to a [Joint Research Centre \(JRC\) report](#), part of the 'Kids' Digital lives in COVID-19 Times (KiDiCoTi)' project. The research is conducted by the JRC and supported by [26 research centres](#) in 15 countries across Europe. Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, Mariya **Gabriel**, said: *"The safety of our children – online and offline – is a priority and a source of concern for us all. The study carried out by the Joint Research Centre helps us to understand better the risks posed to children online and to find improved ways to protect them. These factual findings are invaluable to our science-based policymaking, contributing to tackling issues with the appropriate solutions."* Some 21% of pupils experienced some sort of cyberbullying *more often during the first lockdown in spring 2020*; 28% reported having seen an increase in the same period of hate messages related to people of different race, religion, nationality or sexuality, while 29% had their personal data used online in a way they did not like. Active parental mediation, associated with the 'scaffolding' approach (where parents try to enable children to learn strategies to cope with digital risks by explanation and using the internet together), became much more popular overall; whereas gatekeeping tactics, such blocking of content, or keeping track of visited websites or apps, were employed more frequently during the lockdown. The insights from KiDiCoTi fed into the new [EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child](#) adopted today. (For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Sinéad Meehan-van Druten – Tel.: +32 229 84094)

Education: Commission publishes overview report on teachers in Europe

Today, the European Commission has published the report '[Teachers in Europe](#)'. It sheds light on several key aspects of teachers' professional life, from careers and professional development to their wellbeing, in particular of lower secondary education teachers. Mariya **Gabriel**, Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, states: *"Teachers are the front-line workers in education. Having motivated teachers is an essential pre-requisite for a successful education system, in which pupils from all backgrounds can flourish and reach their full potential. The transition from face-to-face to distance learning has further underlined the vital role of teachers. I am confident that this report will be a great help to education policy makers and other stakeholders at national and European level."* Although, on average in the EU, one teacher out of five works on a temporary contract, this ratio becomes one in three for teachers under 35 years of age. The report examines teachers' initial education, and policies that may influence the take up of continuing professional development. It also explores teachers' wellbeing at work, considering that, at EU level, almost 50%

of teachers report experiencing stress at work. The report also suggests that teachers who have been abroad during their initial teacher education tend to be more mobile during their professional life. The EU programmes are the main funding schemes for teacher transnational mobility, compared to national or regional programmes. The report covers all 27 EU Member States, as well as the United Kingdom, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Switzerland, North Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, and Turkey. This report was drafted by the [Eurydice Network](#), which provides reliable information and comprehensive analyses of European education systems and policies. The network consists of national units located in European countries and is coordinated by the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency. More information is available [online](#) and the full report [here](#). Read the JRC report [here](#). (For more information: Sonya Gospodinova – Tel.: +32 229 66953; Sinéad Meehan-van Druten – Tel.: +32 229 84094)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of GrandVision by EssilorLuxottica, subject to conditions

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the proposed acquisition of GrandVision by EssilorLuxottica. Today's decision follows an [in-depth investigation](#) of the proposed acquisition of GrandVision by EssilorLuxottica. The Commission's in-depth investigation focused in particular on competition concerns that could arise from the combination of EssilorLuxottica's strong market position in the wholesale supply of optical products (i.e., lenses and eyewear) and GrandVision's leading presence in the retail distribution of these products. Following its in-depth market investigation, the Commission had concerns that the transaction, as initially notified, could worsen rival opticians' access to EssilorLuxottica's products in Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands. To address the competition concerns identified by the Commission, EssilorLuxottica offered to divest part of its retail operations: (i) in Belgium, the GrandOptical chain and its 35 stores will be sold but without the brand name; (ii) in Italy, the merged entity will divest a total of 174 stores; (iii) in the Netherlands, 142 stores from the EyeWish chain will be sold, together with the brand name; (iv) the remedy package also contains additional safeguards to ensure the smooth transfer of the divestment business to the purchaser, including transitional supply and support arrangements. The Commission concluded that the proposed transaction, as modified by the commitments, would no longer raise competition concerns. The Commission's decision is conditional upon full compliance with the commitments. Executive Vice-President Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said: "*EssilorLuxottica offers leading brands of eyewear products, such as Ray-Ban, whilst GrandVision is a major optical retailer in Europe. Our in-depth investigation showed that, by acquiring a greater retail footprint, EssilorLuxottica could have degraded the access of rival opticians to EssilorLuxottica's branded eyewear products in Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands. This would mean less choice and higher-priced eyewear for consumers in those countries. The remedies proposed by EssilorLuxottica will address this risk by ensuring that competition at the optical retail level remains vibrant at national level and to the benefit of customers in these countries.*" 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 modification of Spanish schemes, including €10 billion budget increase for aid of limited amount, to further support economy in context of coronavirus outbreak

The European Commission has found the modification of three existing Spanish schemes to support the economy in the context of the coronavirus outbreak to be in line with the State aid [Temporary Framework](#). All three schemes are prolonged until 31 December 2021. For the first "umbrella" scheme, the following additional modifications are included, which reflect the conditions set out in the Temporary Framework: (i) A €10 billion increase in the budget for limited amounts of aid; (ii) Aid ceilings for limited amounts of aid are increased to €225,000 per company active in the primary production of agricultural products (previously €100,000); €270,000 per company active in the fishery and aquaculture sector (previously €120,000), and €1.8 million per company active in all other sectors (previously €800,000); (iii) Authorities will be able to grant guarantees up to 8 years on newly issued subordinated debt instruments; (iv) Authorities will be allowed to convert repayable aid instruments granted under the existing schemes. This will, in particular, allow the conversion of guarantees into grants as well as the extension of maturities of existing guaranteed loans and the conversion of existing guaranteed senior loans into participating loans. For the two "umbrella" schemes, micro and small enterprises will be eligible for aid related to research development and innovation even if they were in difficulty already on 31 December 2019. The Commission concluded that the schemes, as amended, remain necessary, appropriate and proportionate to remedy a serious disturbance in the economy of a Member State, and contribute to fight the health crisis, in line with

Article 107(3)(b) and Article 107(3)(c) TFEU and the conditions set out in the Temporary Framework. On this basis, the Commission approved the measures under EU State aid rules. Executive Vice-President Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said: *"The amendments we have approved today will help Spanish companies preserve economic activity in these difficult times by adapting and enhancing existing Spanish schemes already in force. For example, Spain has made use of the possibility under the State aid Temporary Framework to first grant repayable instruments that can be converted into grants, if it becomes necessary. We continue to work in close cooperation with Member States to find workable solutions to mitigate the economic impact of the coronavirus outbreak, 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 €100 million support in favour of Greek oil and gas company Energean affected by coronavirus outbreak

The European Commission has approved two Greek measures, expected to mobilise a total of €100 million, to support Energean Oil and Gas S.A. in the context of the coronavirus outbreak. The measures were approved under the State aid [Temporary Framework](#). Energean is operating the only oil extraction site in Greece under a concession contract. It generates most of its revenues from the sale of crude oil and has suffered severe losses due to the collapse of oil prices in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak. Energean is currently facing difficulties in accessing financing on the market. Therefore, the aid measures aim at addressing these liquidity needs. The support will take the form of (i) a public guarantee on a commercial loan of around €90.5 million to be contracted by Energean and (ii) a subordinated loan amounting to €9.5 million by the Greek State. The Commission found that the measures are in line with the conditions set out in the Temporary Framework. In particular, the support (i) will be granted no later than 31 December 2021; (ii) will be used to cover Energean's investment and working capital needs during the next twelve months; and (iii) will have a duration of maximum eight years (in line with the Temporary Framework provision that allows to modulate the standard duration of six years if there is appropriate compensation). The Commission concluded that the measures are 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 measures 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.58824 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)

APPOINTMENTS

COLLEGE MEETING: The European Commission appoints a new Head of Representation in Ireland

Today, Barbara Nolan has been appointed as Head of the [European Commission's Representation in Dublin](#). In this function, she will act as the official representative of the European Commission in Ireland under the political authority of President Ursula **von der Leyen**. She will take office on 16 May 2021. Barbara Nolan, an Irish national, has been working for the European Commission for 30 years, during which she has acquired substantial experience in a broad variety of EU policy areas. She is particularly experienced in a range of fields that are essential for the daily work of a Head of Representation such as performing management functions, undertaking representation tasks and leading negotiation efforts. Furthermore, the field of communication also played a central part in her career given her former role as Commission Spokesperson for Employment, Social Affairs and Justice and Home Affairs, and as Head of the Communication Unit at the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (EMPL). She already served as Head of Representation in Ireland from 2010 to 2016, which allowed her to gain a wide experience in promoting EU policies and interests. She is currently the Head of Unit in the Directorate-General for Justice (JUST), responsible for Fundamental Rights Policy. In this position, she has played an important role in championing key European values, in particular the respect, promotion and protection of fundamental rights as

enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. During earlier stages of her career, she held a number of other management positions including at the Directorate for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (EAC) and DG EMPL. At the former, she focused on the coordination of Erasmus+ programme and higher education reform initiatives; at the latter she worked on Antidiscrimination policy and relations with civil society organisations. The press release is available [online](#). (For more information: Balazs Ujvari - Tel.: +32 229 54578; Claire Joawn - Tel.: +32 229 56859)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

President von der Leyen co-chairs Tripartite Social Summit on a fair and sustainable recovery

Today, President **von der Leyen** will co-chair the [Tripartite Social Summit videoconference](#) together with President of the European Council, Charles Michel. The Commission will also be represented by Executive Vice-President **Dombrovskis** and Commissioner **Schmit**. The topic of this summit is 'How to achieve a fair and sustainable recovery?'. Discussions will focus on three topics. First, managing the health, economic and social crisis while maintaining emergency measures. Second, the contribution of the social partners at EU and national level for an economic and social recovery. Third, the road to the Porto Social Summit, which will be organised by the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU later this year in May. The Tripartite Social Summit takes place twice a year ahead of European Council meetings. It is an opportunity for a constructive exchange of views between the leaders of the European institutions, the Heads of State or Government, and the Employment and Social Affairs Ministers of the current trio of Presidencies of the Council of the EU (Portugal, Slovenia, France), as well as the leaders of European and national employee and employer organisations of these Presidency countries. A [press release](#) will be published in the afternoon following the summit. (For more information: Marta Wieczorek - Tel.: +32 229 58197; Flora Matthaes - Tel.: +32 229 83951)

Security Union: New EU-funded projects to protect public spaces against terrorist threats

The Commission is hosting tomorrow a public conference to present a selection of new EU-funded projects aiming to enhance the protection of public spaces against terrorist threats. The projects will look at different types of public spaces, including public places of worship, public transport and major sports venues in 16 Member States. They were selected for funding under the Internal Security Fund – Police for a total amount of over €14 million and are now preparing to launch. During the event, project representatives will present the projects' actions and expected outcomes to the members of the EU Forum on the protection of public spaces, bringing together national authorities and private operators, as well as to the general public. Enhancing the protection of public spaces against terrorist threats is a priority under the [Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the EU](#) presented at the end of last year. The event will take place virtually. You can follow it live [here](#) from 10:00 to 12:00 tomorrow. (For more information: Adalbert Jahnz - Tel.: + 32 229 53156; Ciara Bottomley - Tel.: +32 229 69971; Laura Bérard - Tel.: +32 229 55721)

[Eurostat](#): communiqués de presse

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