



Daily News 04 / 05 / 2021

Brussels, 4 May 2021

EU Cohesion policy: €84 million for urban wastewater treatment plant in Marathon, Greece

The Commission has approved an investment of €84 million from the [Cohesion Fund](#) for the construction of a new infrastructure for sewage collection and treatment in Marathon, in the Attica region of Greece. This new system will enhance public health from the disposal of untreated, or insufficiently treated, wastewater. Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, Elisa **Ferreira**, said: *"I am glad to approve this project as it will offer health and environmental benefits to locals and tourists alike. This is a clear example of EU's support to infrastructure that contributes to the compliance of the EU environmental acquis and meets the goals of the Green Deal."* Approximately 188 km of sewerage pipes will be laid in the agglomerations of Nea Makri and Marathon as well as the construction of 15 pumping stations and the Marathon wastewater treatment plant with a capacity to serve the equivalent of a population of 110,000. An electricity distribution infrastructure and an automated control system for the plant will also be built. Moreover, the sludge produced will be treated as a valuable resource and utilised for biogas production. The project will therefore also contribute to climate change mitigation through the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. More details on EU-funded investments in Greece are available on the [Open Data Platform](#). *(For more information: Vivian Loonela - Tel.: +32 229 66712; Veronica Favalli - Tel.: +32 229 87269)*

Commission extends flexibilities of Common Agricultural Policy checks for 2021

With restrictions still in place across the EU, the Commission adopted today rules to extend to 2021 flexibilities for carrying out checks required for Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) support. The rules allow the replacement of on-farm visits with the use of alternative sources of evidence, including new technologies such as satellite imagery or geo-tagged photos. This will ensure reliable checks while respecting the restriction of movement and minimising physical contact between farmers and inspectors. Furthermore, the rules include flexibility around timing requirements for checks. This allows Member States to postpone checks, notably to a period when movement restrictions are lifted. In addition, the rules comprise a reduction of the number of physical on-the-spot checks to be carried out for area and animal-related measures, rural development investments and market measures. These rules aim to ease the administrative burden of national paying agencies by adapting to current circumstances while still ensuring necessary controls for CAP support. More information on the CAP's management and control systems is available [here](#). More information is also available [here](#). *(For more information: Miriam Garcia Ferrer – Tel.: +32 229 99075; Thérèse Lerebours – Tel.: +32 229 63303)*

EU-UK cooperation in civil and commercial matters: Commission publishes Communication on the UK's application to join the 2007 Lugano Convention

The European Commission has today published a Communication on the United Kingdom's application to join the [Lugano Convention](#), which is an international convention that, amongst other things, extends the benefits of the EU's framework on the recognition and enforcement of civil and commercial judgments to the [EFTA](#) States. These countries participate, at least partly, in the EU's [internal market](#), comprising the free movement of goods, services, capital and persons. Given the UK's decision to leave the EU, its Single Market and Customs Union, as well as its decision to have a more distant relationship with the EU than EEA-EFTA countries, the Commission takes the view that the EU should not give its consent to the UK's request to join the Convention. As for all other third countries, the EU consistently strives for cooperation in the framework of the multilateral Hague Conventions. The Commission has conducted a thorough assessment of the UK's request and has discussed it with Member States. The European Commission considers that the right framework for future cooperation between the European Union and the United Kingdom in the field of civil and commercial matters is provided by the multilateral Hague Conventions instead of the Lugano Convention. The European Parliament and the Council now have an opportunity to express their

views before the Commission informs the Lugano Depository accordingly. More details can be found in today's [Communication](#). (For more information: Daniel Ferrie - Tel: +32 229 86500; Jördis Ferrolli - Tel.: +32 229 92729)

Recovery and Resilience Facility: Poland submits official recovery and resilience plan

The Commission has received an official recovery and resilience plan from Poland. This plan sets out the reforms and public investment projects that Poland plans to implement with the support of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). The RRF is the key instrument at the heart of NextGenerationEU, the EU's plan for emerging stronger from the COVID-19 pandemic. It will provide up to €672.5 billion to support investments and reforms (in 2018 prices). This breaks down into grants worth a total of €312.5 billion and €360 billion in loans. The RRF will play a crucial role in helping Europe emerge stronger from the crisis, and securing the green and digital transitions. The presentation of this plan follows an intensive dialogue between the Commission and the Polish authorities over the past number of months. The Commission has now received a total of 14 recovery and resilience plans, from Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Austria, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, and Slovakia. It will continue to engage intensively with the remaining Member States to help them deliver high quality plans. A [press release](#) and [Q&A](#) are available online. (For more information: Marta Wieczorek - Tel.: +32 229 58197; Enda McNamara - Tel.: +32 229 64976)

Education: Commission launches expert group to step up investment in education in times of COVID-19

The [expert group on quality in investment in education and training](#) launched by Commissioner **Gabriel** in February 2021 met for the first time today. The 15 experts, selected from almost 200 applicants, will identify policies that can effectively boost education and training outcomes as well as inclusiveness and efficiency of spending. Mariya **Gabriel**, Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, said: "*The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us how critical teachers, schools and universities are to our society. Today, we have the chance of rethinking the EU's education and training sector, and put it back at the core of our economies and societies. Therefore, we need clarity and solid evidence on how to best invest in education. I am confident that this expert group will help the Commission and the Member States to build stronger, more resilient and more equitable education and training systems than before.*" The group will focus on the quality of teachers and trainers, education infrastructure and digital education. Their evidence-based evaluation will help the Commission and Member States to find innovative, smart solutions to current educational challenges. This work is key to achieve a sustainable recovery and complete the transition towards a green and digital Europe. The expert group was set out in the [Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025](#) to maintain focus on national and regional investment and improve their effectiveness. It will present an interim report at the end of 2021 and a final report at the end of 2022. More information is available [online](#). (For more information: Sonya Gospodinova - Tel.: +32 229 66953; Sinéad Meehan-van Druten - Tel.: +32 229 84094)

European Development Days: 17 inspirational young leaders will share their vision on solutions to climate change

The European Commission announced this morning the names of the 17 inspiring young people from around the world who will enrich the debates at the [2021 European Development Days](#) (EDD) taking place on 15 and 16 June in a digital format. These young leaders, aged between 21 and 26, have been chosen from among 202 applicants from 99 countries for their exceptional skills, expertise and active contributions to find solutions to climate change issues. They come from a wide range of countries: Mongolia, Indonesia, Brazil, Chile, Zambia, Liberia, Kenya, Nigeria, Honduras, Zimbabwe, India, Lebanon and Vietnam. They will share their vision on how to sustain the planet for future generations, the main topic of this year's edition of the EDD, by participating in high-level panels and special events at the EDD. Since 2015, the Young Leaders Programme has been aiming to ensure that young people have their say on the issues spotlighted each year. The Young Leaders will be able to share their views and experiences with heads of State, human rights activists, business and industry leaders, policymakers, entrepreneurs, representatives from non-governmental organisations and academics during the forum's high-level panels. Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta **Urpilainen** said: "*Because young people are the pillars of tomorrow's world, the European Union supports their empowerment wherever society needs their inspiration and courage to shape a greener and fairer world and to protect our planet. Through the Young Leaders Programme, the European Commission wants to give a voice to them. We believe in their invaluable contribution*

to global development efforts." The 2021 European Development Days will focus on the international community's strategic response to climate change and to the protection of biodiversity: 'The Green deal for a sustainable future' is this year's topic. The event will bring together key players from the whole world. For more information see the [website](#) and the hashtags #EDD21 and #EDDyoungleaders. (For more information: Ana Pisonero - Tel : +32 229 54320; Gesine Knolle - Tel : +32 229 54323)

Employment and social innovation: new loans worth €8 million for small businesses in Lithuania

The European Investment Fund (EIF) and the Lithuanian Credit Union LKU Group (LCCU) have signed a cooperation agreement for a guarantee facility, to launch an €8 million microcredit programme for small businesses in Lithuania. The guarantee is supported under the [EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation \(EaSI\)](#). 11 credit unions, members of the LCCU, will act as financial intermediaries. As a result, much needed financing will become available to small and micro-enterprises in Lithuania through at least 320 new transactions for a maximum loan amount of €25,000. Credits under this agreement will be provided to businesses with no more than nine employees and an annual turnover not exceeding €2 million. This operation follows a [previous collaboration](#) with LCCU last year, also supported through the EU EaSI programme. Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, Nicolas **Schmit**, said: "Small businesses need access to financing to start-up or continue their operations as well as to create and maintain jobs, especially in these challenging times. With support from the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation and the EIF, the Lithuanian Central Credit Union will be able to launch an additional €8 million microcredit programme specifically tailored to the financing needs of small businesses in Lithuania." The press release is available [here](#). (For more information: Marta Wieczorek - Tel.: +32 229 58197; Flora Matthaes - Tel.: +32 229 83951)

Aliments nouveaux : la Commission autorise pour la première fois un insecte comme aliment

Aujourd'hui, les États membres ont approuvé une proposition de la Commission européenne, autorisant l'utilisation de vers de farine jaunes séchés en tant que [nouvel aliment](#). Suite à une [évaluation scientifique](#) rigoureuse d'AESA, il s'agit de la toute première autorisation de mise sur le marché de l'UE d'insectes en tant que nouveaux aliments. Ce nouvel aliment peut être utilisé comme insecte séché entier sous forme de collation ou comme ingrédient d'un certain nombre de produits alimentaires, par exemple sous forme de poudre dans des produits protéiques, biscuits ou produits à base de pâtes. La [stratégie « De la ferme à la table »](#) identifie les insectes comme une source de protéines de substitution qui peut soutenir la transition de l'UE vers un système alimentaire plus durable. Des millions de personnes consomment déjà des insectes chaque jour. En outre, l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour l'alimentation et l'agriculture (FAO) qualifient les insectes comme source alimentaire saine et très nutritive à forte teneur en matières grasses, protéines, vitamines, fibres et minéraux. La décision formelle de la Commission sera adoptée dans les prochaines semaines. Vous trouverez plus d'informations et des questions-réponses [ici](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Stefan de Keersmaecker — Tél.: + 32 229 84680; Stephan Meder — Tél.: + 32 229 13917)

Russia: Summoning of the Russian Ambassador to the EU

The Secretary-General of the European Commission, Ilze Juhansone, and the Secretary-General of the External Action Service, Stefano Sannino, jointly summoned the Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the European Union, Vladimir Chizhov, on Monday to condemn the decision of the Russian authorities from last Friday to ban eight European Union nationals from entering the territory of the Russian Federation. Ambassador Chizhov was informed of the strong rejection and firm condemnation by the [EU institutions](#) and [EU Member States](#) of this decision, which was purely politically motivated and lacks any legal justification. Secretaries-General Juhansone and Sannino also recalled Russia's expulsion of Czech diplomats and the executive order of the Russian Federation of so-called 'unfriendly states', expressing their grave concern for the cumulative impact of all these decisions on the relations between the EU and the government of the Russian Federation. They also noted that the EU reserves the right to take appropriate measures in response. A press release is available [online](#). (For more information: Eric Mamer - Tel.: +32 229 94073; Dana Spinant - Tel.: +32 229 90150; Peter Stano - Tel.: +32 229 54553; Adam Kaznowski - Tel.: +32 229 89359)

State Aid: Commission opens in-depth investigation into alleged aid received by shipping company Fred Olsen from Canary Islands port authority

The European Commission has opened an in-depth investigation to reassess whether the shipping company Fred Olsen received incompatible State aid from the Canary Islands port authority, "Puertos de Canarias", after the General Court annulled the Commission's initial decision of December 2015. Following a complaint by Fred Olsen's competitor Naviera Armas, the Commission in 2015 had concluded that the conditions of use of the publicly financed port infrastructure in Puerto de las Nieves (Gran Canaria) did not constitute State aid in favour of Fred Olsen. Naviera Armas challenged this decision and the General Court partly annulled it in March 2018, insofar the Commission had found that the measures did not involve aid without opening an in-depth investigation. In light of the judgment, the Commission will now re-assess in particular whether Puertos de Canarias charged Fred Olsen a sufficient price for its *de facto* exclusive use of the Puerto de las Nieves port infrastructure. Fred Olsen was the first commercial shipping company to apply for and receive an authorisation to use Puerto de las Nieves for commercial transport. The company has operated a ferry connection between Puerto de las Nieves and Tenerife since 1994. Due to the very limited size of the port, with only one docking place, Puertos de Canarias has refused requests from other shipping companies to use the infrastructure based on safety reasons. The opening of an in-depth investigation provides Spain and any interested third party with the opportunity to submit comments. It does not prejudice the outcome of the investigation. The non-confidential version of the decision will be made available under the case number SA.36628 in the [State aid register](#) on the Commission's [competition website](#) once any confidentiality issues have been resolved. New publications of State aid decisions on the internet and in the Official Journal are listed in the Competition Weekly e-News. *(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 €90 million Slovak scheme to support operators in tourism sector in context of coronavirus outbreak

The European Commission has approved a €90 million Slovak scheme to support operators active in the tourism sector affected by the coronavirus outbreak. The measure was approved under the State aid [Temporary Framework](#). The public support, which will take form of direct grants, aims at mitigating the impact on the beneficiaries of the restrictive measures that the Slovak government had to implement to limit the spread of the coronavirus. The aid will compensate tourism operators for part of their uncovered fixed costs and will be granted to enterprises that suffered a decrease in turnover of at least 40% for the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 December 2021, or part of this period, compared to the same period in 2019. The amount of aid under the measure will not exceed 10% of the nominal decrease in net turnover. The Commission found that the Slovak scheme is in line with the conditions set out in the Temporary Framework. In particular, the aid (i) will not exceed 70% of the uncovered fixed costs, except for micro and small enterprises, where it will not exceed 90% of the uncovered fixed costs; (ii) will not exceed €10 million per beneficiary; and (iii) will be granted no later than 31 December 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.62256 in the [State aid register](#) on the Commission's [competition website](#). *(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 €400 million Danish aid scheme to support production of electricity from renewable energy sources

The European Commission has approved, under EU State aid rules, a Danish aid scheme to support electricity production from renewable sources. The measure will help Denmark reach its renewable energy targets without unduly distorting competition and will contribute to the European objective of achieving climate neutrality by 2050. Denmark notified the Commission of its intention to introduce a new scheme to support electricity produced from renewable energy sources, namely onshore wind turbines, offshore wind turbines, wave power plants, hydroelectric power plants and solar PV. The aid will be awarded through a competitive tendering procedure organised in 2021-2024 and will take the form of a two-way contract-for-difference premium.. The measure has a total maximum budget of approximately €400 million (DKK 3 billion). The scheme is open until 2024 and aid can be paid out for a maximum of 20 years after the renewable electricity is connected to the grid. The Commission

assessed the measure under EU State aid rules, in particular the [2014 Guidelines on State aid for environmental protection and energy](#). On this basis, the Commission concluded that the Danish scheme is in line with EU State aid rules, as it will facilitate the development of renewable electricity production from various technologies in Denmark and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, in line with the [European Green Deal](#) and without unduly distorting competition. Executive Vice-President Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said: *"This Danish scheme will contribute to substantial reductions in greenhouse emissions, supporting the objectives of the Green Deal. It will provide important support to a wide range of technologies generating renewable electricity, in line with EU rules. The wide eligibility criteria and the selection of the beneficiaries through a competitive bidding process will ensure the best value for taxpayers money and will minimise possible distortions of competition."* (For more information: Arianna Podesta – Tel. +32 229 87024; Giulia Astuti – Tel: +32 229 55344; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Indukern by Ravago

The European Commission has approved, under the EU Merger Regulation, the acquisition of Indukern S.A. of Spain by Ravago Chemicals S.A. of Luxembourg, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Ravago Group. Indukern is active in the distribution of third-party speciality chemicals at a global level. The Ravago Group is active in the production and distribution of polymers and rubbers, and in the distribution of third-party chemicals at a global level. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns given the companies' limited combined market position resulting from the proposed transaction, in the distribution of third-party speciality chemicals globally. 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.10213](#). (For more information: Arianna Podesta – Tel. +32 229 87024; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Mergers: Commission fines Sigma-Aldrich €7.5 million for providing misleading information during Merck takeover investigation

The European Commission has fined Sigma-Aldrich €7.5 million for providing incorrect or misleading information during the Commission's investigation under the EU Merger Regulation of Merck's acquisition of Sigma-Aldrich. The [EU Merger Regulation](#) obliges companies in a merger investigation to provide correct and non-misleading information. On [15 June 2015](#), the Commission approved the proposed acquisition subject to the divestiture of certain Sigma-Aldrich assets, which would address the competition concerns identified in markets for specific laboratory chemicals. In the context of the divestment process, the Commission was made aware that an innovation project, called iCap was closely linked to the divested business and specifically developed for products included in the divestment business. However, the project had not been disclosed to the Commission. Moreover, the Commission found indications that Sigma-Aldrich's supply of incorrect or misleading information was intended to avoid the transfer of the relevant project to the purchaser of the divestment business. Hence, statements provided to the Commission were incorrect or misleading and prevented the Commission from undertaking an informed assessment of the intended scope of the commitments. In today's decision, the Commission concludes that Sigma-Aldrich committed three distinct infringements by providing, deliberately or at least negligently, incorrect or misleading information in the explanatory submission describing the remedy package and in the replies to two requests for information made pursuant to Article 11(2) of the EU Merger Regulation. Today's decision has no impact on the Commission's decision to authorise the transaction under the EU Merger Regulation. Executive Vice-President Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said: *"The effectiveness of our merger control system relies on the accuracy of the information provided by the companies involved. Accurate information is essential for the Commission to take competition decisions in full knowledge of the facts. Today's decision to fine Sigma-Aldrich shows that companies should not withhold or provide misleading information. This is vital for the assessment of a deal, especially for research and development projects, which are by nature secret and for which only the parties have access to relevant information."* The full press release is online [here](#). (For more information: Arianna Podesta – Tel. +32 229 87024; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

La Commission lance le mois européen de la diversité

La Commission lance aujourd'hui [le mois européen de la diversité](#), une initiative qui célèbre les efforts déployés pour promouvoir la diversité sur le lieu de travail et dans la société. La [cérémonie de lancement de haut niveau](#) qui a lieu aujourd'hui réunit des décideurs politiques, des PDG d'entreprises qui ont signé la charte de la diversité et d'autres organisations afin d'examiner et de promouvoir la prise en compte de l'origine ethnique dans les stratégies de diversité. La vice-présidente Vera **Jourová** a déclaré: « *La diversité est un facteur de réussite pour les entreprises. La diversité est un moteur de l'innovation, une ressource précieuse. Dans le cadre de la sortie de la pandémie, nous soulignerons l'importance de la diversité et de l'inclusion* ». Helena **Dalli**, commissaire chargée de l'égalité, qui a ouvert la conférence, a ajouté: « *La diversité sur le lieu de travail doit être l'une des principales priorités de tout employeur en Europe. Lorsque les salariés sont appréciés pour qui ils sont, ils peuvent utiliser pleinement leurs talents et leur créativité. J'invite toutes les organisations d'Europe, qu'elles soient signataires d'une charte de la diversité ou non, à rejoindre la Commission européenne pour célébrer le mois européen de la diversité en organisant leurs propres événements afin de mettre en lumière les avantages des environnements de travail inclusifs* ». Au total, 26 chartes de la diversité ont été établies en Europe depuis 2006. Elles soutiennent et encouragent les bonnes pratiques en matière de gestion de la diversité auprès de milliers d'entreprises multinationales de premier plan, de petites et moyennes entreprises ainsi que d'organisations publiques et à but non lucratif. À l'heure actuelle, plus de 12 800 signataires de chartes de la diversité se sont engagés à promouvoir la diversité et l'égalité des chances sur le lieu de travail, indépendamment de leur origine ethnique, de leur orientation sexuelle, de leur âge, de leur sexe, de leur handicap ou de leur religion. De plus amples informations sont disponibles dans la présente [fiche d'information](#) et sur cette [page web](#). (Pour plus d'information: Christian Wigand - Tél.: +32 229 62253; Katarzyna Kolanko - Tél.: +32 229 63444; Jördis Ferroli - Tél.: +32 229 92729)

[Liste des points prévus](#) à l'ordre du jour des prochaines réunions de la Commission

Veuillez noter que ces informations sont données sous réserve de modifications.

[Eurostat](#): communiqués de presse

MEX/21/2244