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Investment Plan for Europe helps to finance early stage SMEs in Spain

The European Investment Fund (EIF) and Inveready Venture Finance, a Spanish fund, have signed a guarantee agreement, benefiting from the support of the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) - the heart of the [Investment Plan for Europe](#). The agreement will allow Inveready to provide €6.6 million of loans to early stage, small, innovative companies in Spain over the next 2 years, with more expected in the coming months. The loan comes under the Horizon 2020 programme's [InnovFin](#) initiative. European Commission Vice-President Jyrki **Katainen**, responsible for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness, said: *"The agreement between the EIF and Inveready announced today is a good example of the type of risk financing the EFSI was created for. The Inveready Fund finances SMEs at an early stage in their development, which means they are not always eligible for bank loans, so the EFSI is helping to play a crucial role in SME financing."* (For more information see [here](#) or contact Annika Breidhardt – Tel.: +32 229 56153; Siobhán Millbright – Tel.: + 32 229 57361)

EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement Now Available Online

The European Commission today published the [text of the free trade agreement \(FTA\) between the EU and Vietnam](#), following the conclusion of the negotiating process in December 2015 and in line with its transparency commitments. *"I am glad that we now publish this agreement in line with our strong commitment to a transparent trade policy"*, said EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia **Malmström**, adding that *"When approved, the agreement will unlock a market with huge potential for EU firms. Vietnam is a fast-growing economy of more than 90 million consumers with a growing middle class and a young and dynamic workforce. Its market offers numerous opportunities for the EU's agricultural, industrial and services exports. The agreement will also help trigger a new wave of high quality investment in both directions, supported by our new investment dispute resolution system with an appeal mechanism."* In addition to creating new opportunities for EU firms, the agreement aims to support Vietnam's transition towards a more competitive and more sustainable economy. To highlight ways of addressing possible impacts of the EU-Vietnam FTA on human rights and sustainable development, the Commission accompanies the publication of the agreement with a [dedicated analysis](#). A full press release is available in [EN](#), [FR](#) and [DE](#). (For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel.: + 32 229 56185; Clémence Robin - Tel.: +32 229 52509)

State aid: Commission approves prolongation of Polish bank guarantee scheme

The European Commission has authorised under EU state aid rules the prolongation of the Polish bank guarantee scheme until 30 June 2016. The scheme covers guarantees and other liquidity support measures in favour of solvent credit institutions in Poland. It was initially [approved in September 2009](#) and prolonged several times, last time in [August 2015](#). In [February 2012](#), the pricing conditions of the scheme were brought in line with the requirements of the [Commission's 2011 Communication on state aid to banks during the crisis](#). Other conditions of the original scheme remain unchanged. The Commission found the prolongation of the scheme to be in line with its [guidelines on state aid to banks during the crisis](#) because it is well targeted, proportionate and limited in time and scope. During the application of the extraordinary crisis rules for state aid to banks, the Commission is authorising guarantee schemes on banks' liabilities for periods of six months in order to be able to monitor developments and adjust conditions accordingly. More information will be available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the [public case register](#), under the case number SA.43924. (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Yizhou Ren – Tel.: +32 229 94889)

State aid: Commission authorises Hungarian investment aid for Audi

After an [in-depth investigation](#), the European Commission has found €133 million in state support by Hungary to AUDI HUNGARIA MOTOR Ltd. for an investment project in Győr to be in line with EU state aid rules. AUDI HUNGARIA MOTOR invested a total of € 1.2 billion in a fully integrated production plant

for passenger cars on its existing site. This is expected to create 2 100 jobs in Győr in Western Transdanubia, a disadvantaged region of Hungary with a GDP per capita far below the EU average. The area is therefore entitled to benefit from aid to encourage investments, under the [Hungarian regional aid map](#) applicable at the time of granting the aid. The Commission's assessment showed that the aid was necessary for the project to go ahead in Győr, as the aid merely compensated the company for extra investment costs incurred by carrying out the project in Győr and not in an alternative location. The Commission therefore concluded that the positive effects of the project on regional development clearly outweigh any distortion of competition created by the aid. More information will be available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the public [case register](#) under the case number SA.36754. (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Yizhou Ren – Tel.: +32 229 94889)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Grupo Condesa by ArcelorMittal and nine financial institutions

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of joint control over Grupo Condesa of Spain by ArcelorMittal of Luxembourg and Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria S.A., Banco de Sabadell S.A., Banco Santander S.A., Banco Popular Español S.A., Bankia S.A., Caixabank S.A., Bankinter S.A., Caja Rural de Navarra S. Coop. de Crédito and Kutxabank S.A., all of Spain. Grupo Condesa produces small welded carbon steel tubes. ArcelorMittal is a global steel and mining company. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, because it would not significantly change the market structure. The transaction was examined under the normal merger review procedure. More information is available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the public [case register](#) under the case number [M.7762](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Carolina Luna Gordo – Tel.: +32 229 68386)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Bombardier Transportation UK by Bombardier and CDPQ

The European Commission has approved the acquisition of joint control over the newly created Bombardier Transportation (Investment) UK Limited, of the United Kingdom ("BTUK"), by Bombardier Inc. and Caisse de dépôt et placement Québec ("CDPQ"), both of Canada under the EU Merger Regulation. BTUK will essentially comprise Bombardier's current transportation business, offering the full spectrum of rail solutions, such as rolling stock, maintenance services, system integration and signalling. Bombardier is a multinational aerospace and transportation company, engaged in the design, development, manufacture and marketing of aircraft and rail transportation equipment and related services. CDPQ is an institutional investor. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, given in particular that the companies' activities do not overlap and CDPQ controls no company which would have a significant position as a customer or supplier of BTUK. The transaction was examined under the normal merger review procedure. More information is available on the Commission's [competition](#) website, in the public [case register](#) under the case number [M.7871](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Carolina Luna Gordo – Tel.: +32 229 68386)

EUROSTAT: 60% of lower secondary level pupils studied more than one foreign language in 2014

Learning a foreign language at school is very common in the European Union (EU), with around 18 million lower secondary school pupils (or 98.6% of all pupils at this level) studying at least one foreign language in 2014. Among them, nearly 11 million (59.9%) were studying two foreign languages or more. English was by far the most popular language at lower secondary level, studied by more than 17 million pupils (97.3%). French (5 million or 33.7%) came second, followed by German (3 million or 23.1%) and Spanish (2 million or 13.1%). A Eurostat press release is available [here](#). (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

HR/VP Federica Mogherini to attend the third ministerial meeting of the Small Group of the Global Coalition to counter Da'esh in Rome

The High Representative/Vice President, Federica Mogherini, will be travelling to Rome on 2 February to take part in the third ministerial meeting of the Small Group of the Global Coalition to counter

Da'esh. The meeting will provide an opportunity for Global Coalition partners to assess the recent developments, in particular in Sinjar and Ramadi in Iraq, and to chart the course for the Coalition's response to the challenges that lie ahead. The meeting will also be an opportunity for ministers to discuss the fight against Da'esh in the broader context of the intra-Syrian talks in Geneva and the upcoming London Syria Conference, in view of developing a long term response to growth of radicalisation and terrorism through measures of de-escalation of violence inside Syria and support for Syrian refugees. The EU is a full coalition partner and is contributing the Coalition's actions by non-military activities, including measures to tackle the foreign terrorist fighters issue, prevent terrorist financing, counter the terrorists' narrative, and stabilise the areas liberated from Da'esh in Iraq. *(For more information: Catherine Ray – Tel.: +32 229 69921; Nabila Massrali – Tel.: +32 229 69218)*

European Commission and African Union agree deal to further administrative cooperation, staff exchange

The European Commission and [the African Union Commission](#) on Sunday signed an agreement that will renew cooperation between the two bodies, intensifying staff exchanges and cooperation in a number of priority areas. Under the arrangement, the European Commission staff will be able to work, for a limited period of time, in the administration of the African Union Commission and vice-versa. The agreement also foresees exchanges of expertise and best practices, mainly in the areas of administration, learning and development and financial management, via, for example, trainings, exchange of materials, sharing of experience. The Administrative Arrangement was signed at the African Union Summit in Addis Ababa, by European Commission Vice-President Kristalina **Georgieva** and Mr. Erastus J.O. Mwencha, Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission. The agreement takes effect immediately and runs for five years. More information is available [here](#). Photos are available on [EbS](#). *(For more information: Alexander Winterstein - Tel.: +32 229 93265, Andreana Stankova – Tel.: +32 229 57857)*

European Commission appoints new Head of Representation in Madrid

The European Commission has appointed Aránzazu Beristain Ibarrola as Head of the European Commission Representation in Madrid. She brings almost 30 years of experience in diplomatic and European affairs to the job and takes up her new duties today. Ms Beristain Ibarrola has been acting Head of the Representation in Madrid since March 2015, having previously combined the roles of Deputy Head of Representation and Head of the Communication Sector. She first joined the Commission in 1986 as an administrator in the Directorate-General responsible for fisheries policy, and subsequently worked in the private offices of Commissioners Oreja, Matutes and Vice-President Marin. More information on the appointment of Ms Ibarrola is available [here](#) ([ES](#), [FR](#), [DE](#)). *(For more information: Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 229 91382; Alexander Winterstein - Tel.: +32 229 93265; Andreana Stankova – Tel.: +32 229 57857)*

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