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Brussels, 15 March 2016

European Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos visits Idomeni today

Dimitris **Avramopoulos**, European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship is visiting Idomeni today, accompanied by Commission experts who are supporting the Greek authorities on the ground. Commissioner Avramopoulos will tour the camp to get a first-hand understanding of the situation, and will meet with migrants staying there as well as representatives from UNHCR, IOM, Médecins Sans Frontières, EASO and Frontex. The number of migrants in Greece is currently estimated at around 45,000 people, with 12,000 of them in Idomeni. The Commission's primary concern is to prevent the ongoing humanitarian situation on the ground from worsening. We are using all available resources to support Greece and address the emergency needs, including reinforcement of reception capacities, improvement of border management and increased relocation and return operations. Commissioner **Avramopoulos** said: *"We are here today to reaffirm our solidarity and support to Greece in addressing the humanitarian needs of the large number of migrants in the country. Most importantly, we are here to acknowledge that the crisis is above all affecting those men, women and children who I met today. The generosity of the Greek people is an example for us all. The efforts by the Greek authorities, EU Agencies, international organisations and NGOs to provide relief must be commended. We all share the same goal: to address effectively the increasing needs of migrants hosted in Greece and to alleviate their suffering. We can only resolve this through a common, coherent approach using all the financial, material and political resources we have at our disposal. Right now, the priority is to make relocation part of our humanitarian response, to address the immediate needs of the people in reception centres and to move people away from Idomeni to safer locations in Greece or other Member States."* The Commission will deploy all available budgetary means to provide support on the ground, firstly under the existing instruments of the Asylum Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and the Internal Security Fund (ISF) and secondly under the new proposal for emergency assistance within the EU which the Commission adopted on 2 March. For the period 2014-2020, Greece will receive €509 million under Greece's National programme for the AMIF and ISF funds. The Commission has already provided €148 million in emergency funding to Greece in 2015 and 2016, including €80 million to help build reception capacity to house migrants and refugees in Greece via the UNHCR and €21 million via the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) to support relocation. (For more information: Margaritis Schinas – Tel.: +32 229 60524; Natasha Bertaud – Tel.: +32 229 67456)

European Commission activates exceptional measures to further support European farmers in crisis

The European Commission announced at the Council meeting of agriculture ministers an additional package of exceptional measures using all the tools made available in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to support EU farmers while safeguarding the EU internal market. The series of measures outlined by Commissioner **Hogan** to the agriculture Ministers of the European Union complements the €500 million support package from last September and shows the Commission's determination to play its full role in assisting European farmers. Commissioner **Hogan** declared yesterday: *"In the interest of EU farmers, I am prepared to use all instruments that the legislators have put at our disposal, both as a short term and long term measure. We must use the appropriate instruments and actions to enable farmers to be resilient in the face of volatility whilst providing immediate assistance to them. Our response is a comprehensive one, taking on board as many of the proposals as can be done, within the legal and budgetary constraints that apply to all of us. I believe that this is a package of measures which, when taken with the full implementation of the September solidarity package, can have a material and positive impact on European agricultural markets and it should now be given the chance to succeed."* The full [press release](#) with the list of measures is available online. (For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel: +32 229 56 185; Clémence Robin – Tel: +32 229 52 509)

Syria Crisis: European Commission announces €445 million in humanitarian aid

Today the European Commission announces €445 million in humanitarian aid for the Syria crisis in 2016. The support is part of the Commission's pledge made at the conference 'Supporting Syria and the Region' held earlier this year in London, where the EU and the Member States pledged over €3 billion to assist the Syrian people this year. EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid & Crisis Management, Christos **Stylianides**, said *"Today is yet another sad milestone in the world's worst humanitarian disaster since the Second World War which now enters its sixth year, with over 13 million Syrians in need of lifesaving aid in their country alone. The European Union is committed to supporting the Syrian people, for as long as it takes. Today's funding will support the most vulnerable Syrians inside the country and in neighbouring Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. We need more unconditional humanitarian access now, more than ever to build on the recent efforts during the Cessation of hostilities in the country."* Funding will be channelled through the United Nations, International Organisations, and international NGO partners, and will respond to life-threatening needs in the areas of food aid, health, water, sanitation and hygiene as well as education. It will be allocated per country as follows: Syria (€140 million), Lebanon (€87 million), Jordan (€53 million) and Turkey (€165 million). A [press release](#) is available. (For more information: Alexandre Polack – Tel.: +32 229 90677; Daniel Puglisi – Tel.: +32 229 69140)

European Commission announces €38 million for new development programmes in Sri Lanka

Today the European Commission will co-sign two new support programmes worth €38 million in total in the field of rural development and trade with Sri Lanka, as EU Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven Mimica, arrives for a three day visit to the country. Ahead of the visit Commissioner **Mimica** said: *"With this new support, we are boosting our longstanding relationship with Sri Lanka on development cooperation. The EU has made an important contribution in providing humanitarian assistance and reconstruction support to help Sri Lanka recover from the war and the tsunami. Now our focus is on providing long-term support towards poverty reduction and local economic development. We have a new opportunity to support governance and reconciliation efforts and help address the root causes of the conflict in Sri Lanka."* A [press release](#) as well as a [Factsheet](#) on EU – Sri Lanka development cooperation are available online. (For more information: Alexandre Polack – Tel.: +32 229 90677; Daniel Puglisi – Tel.: +32 229 69140)

EU supports Zika research with €10 million

The European Commission is today releasing €10 million for research on the Zika virus, currently affecting large parts of Latin America. The [Horizon 2020](#) funding will go into projects seeking to develop diagnostics and test potential treatments or vaccines. Carlos **Moedas**, European Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation, said: *"This funding will enable urgently needed research on the emerging global threat of the Zika virus. This shows once again that we are ready to face new epidemics like Zika with fast and effective research."* Vytenis **Andriukaitis**, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, added: *"The Commission is carefully monitoring the situation and, as the summer approaches, is working closely together with the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, the World Health Organisation and Member States to ensure that the response to the virus is coherent and well-coordinated."* The most affected country is Brazil, where the World Health Organisation has declared that the recent cluster of severe brain malformations in new-borns may be linked to the virus. While the risk of transmission of the Zika virus in the EU is low, there is currently no treatment or vaccine against the virus, and diagnostic tests for infections are not widely available. A press release is available [here](#). (For more information: Lucía Caudet - Tel.: +32 229 56182, Axel Fougner - Tel.: +32 229 57276)

Aides d'Etat: la Commission clôt l'enquête relative aux aides en faveur de FagorBrandt et du Groupe Brandt après remboursement

A l'issue d'une enquête approfondie ouverte [le 16 septembre 2014](#), la Commission a conclu que les prêts consentis par la France à FagorBrandt et au Groupe Brandt, qui lui a succédé, ont procuré un avantage économique contraire aux règles UE en matière d'aides d'Etat à ces entreprises. FagorBrandt et le Groupe Brandt ont bénéficié de prêts publics pour des montants respectivement de €10 millions en novembre 2013 et de €47,5 millions en avril 2014, à des taux d'intérêt inférieurs à ceux du marché. Cependant, les taux d'intérêt ont été augmentés rétroactivement en cours de procédure et le Groupe Brandt a remboursé le montant résultant, de sorte que l'avantage reçu et la distorsion de concurrence induite par l'aide ont été neutralisés. Par conséquent, la procédure de la Commission est devenue sans objet et la Commission a clôturé le dossier. La version non confidentielle de la décision sera publiée sous le numéro SA.38644 dans le registre des aides d'État figurant sur le site web de la DG Concurrence, dès que les éventuels problèmes de confidentialité auront été résolus. Le bulletin

d'information électronique State Aid Weekly e-News donne la liste des dernières décisions relatives aux aides d'État publiées au Journal officiel et sur l'internet. (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel. +32 229 80100; Yizhou Ren – Tel.: +32 229 94889)

Competition: Commissioner Vestager agrees with Japan Fair Trade Commission to prepare upgrade of EU/Japan Cooperation Agreement

European Commissioner for Competition Margrethe Vestager and Japan Fair Trade Commission Chairman Kazuyuki Sugimoto have agreed to prepare the upgrading of the existing EU/Japan [Cooperation Agreement on Anticompetitive Activities](#) so as to allow for the exchange of evidence during investigations. The agreement was reached during the current visit of Commissioner Vestager to Japan for meetings with Japan Fair Trade Commission (JFTC) Chairman Sugimoto and other political counterparts to discuss the role of competition policy to enhance competitiveness. Commissioner **Vestager** said: "For more than a decade now, the European Commission and the Japan Fair Trade Commission have benefitted from a strong relationship based on our existing Cooperation Agreement. Today, Chairman Kazuyuki Sugimoto and I have committed to take the cooperation to the next level by preparing the necessary steps to enable the two authorities to exchange evidence during common investigations." Commissioner Vestager and JFTC Chairman Sugimoto also discussed the latest developments in competition policy and enforcement. Commissioner Vestager noted with interest the draft JFTC guidelines on Competition Policy and Public Support for Revitalization and shared the European Commission's experience in dealing with rescue and restructuring aid. Her visit to Tokyo also includes meetings with Ms Tomomi Inada, Chairman of the Policy Research Council of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP); Mr Taro Kono, Minister of Administrative Reform; Mr Junji Suzuki, State Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) and Mr Yoshimasa Hayashi, MP (LDP). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel. +32 229 80100; Carolina Luna Gordo – Tel.: +32 229 68386; Yizhou Ren – Tel.: +32 229 94889)

European Commission adopts equivalence decision for central counterparties ('CCPs') in USA

The European Commission has today determined that the U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) has the equivalent requirements as the EU in regulating central counterparties ('CCPs'). This follows the announcement of [10 February 2016](#) by Commissioner Hill and Chairman Timothy Massad on a common approach for transatlantic CCPs. This decision will ensure that both the EU and the US operate to the same high standards and at a comparable level of cost to their participants. It also alleviates the regulatory burden for the US and the EU, allowing compliance with only one set of rules. This will encourage market certainty and cross-border activity, avoiding fragmentation of markets and liquidity. Commissioner Jonathan **Hill**, responsible for financial stability, financial services and capital markets union said: "This is an important step forward for global regulatory convergence and implementing our agreement with the CFTC. It means that US CCPs, once recognised by ESMA, can continue to provide services to EU companies. We look forward to the CFTC's forthcoming decision on substituted compliance which will allow European CCPs to do business in the United States more easily" For more information, see our [press release](#). (For more information: Vanessa Mock - +32 229 56194; Letizia Lupini - +32 229 51958)

Have your say on termination rates: a key part of your phone bill

Today the Commission launched a [public consultation on fixed and mobile termination rates](#). These rates are the costs that telecoms operators charge each other to deliver calls between networks. They are ultimately included in call prices for consumers and are therefore a key part of their phone bill. The results of the public consultation will help the Commission revise the [2009 Termination Rates Recommendation](#). The objective of the Recommendation is to increase consistency across EU countries in the way national regulatory authorities set termination rates and reduce discrepancies between fixed and mobile termination charges. It therefore plays an important role in the [Digital Single Market](#). The consultation is open until 7 June 2016. The questionnaire is available in English, French and German, but the answers can be submitted in any EU language. More details can be found [here](#). (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Marie Frenay - Tel.: +32 229 64532)

Commission approves the first Protected Designation of Origin from Romania

The Commission has approved today the addition of the first Romanian product to the register of Protected Designations of Origin (PDO). '[Telemea de Ibănești](#)' is a cheese based on milk obtained from indigenous Gurghiu valley cows, salted by use of brine from the salt water well in Orșova. The local method of producing Telemea de Ibănești has been passed on from generation to generation. The

cheese has to be produced within the territories of Gurghiu, Hodac and Ibănești in Mureș county, which in part of the Gurghiu valley. This new denomination will be added to the list of over 1,330 products already protected. More information: webpages on [quality products](#) and [DOOR database](#) of protected products. (For more information: Daniel Rosario – Tel: +32 229 56 185; Clémence Robin – Tel: +32 229 52509)

EUROSTAT: Fourth quarter of 2015 compared with the third quarter of 2015 - Employment up by 0.3% in euro area and by 0.1% in the EU28

The number of persons employed increased by 0.3% in the euro area (EA19) and by 0.1% in the EU28 in the fourth quarter of 2015 compared with the previous quarter, according to national accounts estimates published by Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union. Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, Marianne **Thyssen**, said: "Employment figures are gradually increasing, but getting people into jobs must remain a top priority. Today the Council signed the final adoption of the EURES regulation, and tomorrow we will sit together with the EU social partners on the occasion of the Tripartite Social Summit for Growth and Employment to discuss the challenges for the labour market. The Commission will continue to work for more jobs, growth and investment." In the third quarter of 2015, employment increased by 0.3% in both zones. These figures are seasonally adjusted. Compared with the same quarter of the previous year, employment increased by 1.2% in the euro area and by 1.0% in the EU28 in the fourth quarter of 2015 (after +1.1% and +1.0% respectively in the third quarter of 2015). Eurostat estimates that, in the fourth quarter of 2015, 229.9 million men and women were employed in the EU28, of which 151.9 million were in the euro area. These figures are seasonally adjusted. These quarterly data on employment provide a picture of labour input consistent with the output and income measure of national accounts. A full Eurostat press release is [available online](#). (For more information: Christian Wigand– Tel.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: + 32 229 67094)

EUROSTAT: Births and fertility in the EU - Over 5.1 million babies born in 2014

In 2014, 5.132 million babies were born in the European Union (EU), compared with 5.063 million in 2001. Among Member States, France continued to record the highest number of births (819 300 in 2014), ahead of the United Kingdom (775 900), Germany (714 900), Italy (502 600), Spain (426 100) and Poland (375 200). On average in the EU, women who gave birth to their first child in 2014 were aged nearly 29 (28.8 years). Across Member States, first time mothers were the youngest in Bulgaria and the oldest in Italy. Overall, the fertility rate in the EU increased from 1.46 in 2001 to 1.58 in 2014. It varied between Member States from 1.23 in Portugal to 2.01 in France in 2014. A total fertility rate of around 2.1 live births per woman is considered to be the replacement level in developed countries: in other words, the average number of live births per woman required to keep the population size constant in the absence of inward or outward migration. This information comes from an article issued by Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union. The fertility indicators presented in this news release show only a small part of the large amount of data related to demography available at Eurostat. A full Eurostat press release is [available online](#). (For more information: Christian Wigand– Tel.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: + 32 229 67094)

STATEMENTS

Statement by Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility Marianne Thyssen on the Council adoption of the revamped European Jobs Search Network (EURES)

"I warmly welcome today's final adoption by the Council of our proposal to reinforce EURES, the European Jobs Search Network. For more than twenty years, EURES has helped people find jobs in another Member State, thereby reaping the benefits our internal market has to offer. The new regulation will build on this experience and bring further improvements: the network will be open to more partners, such as private employment services, and more jobs will be advertised on its [job portal](#). In addition, the regulation aims at a better online matching between candidates and vacancies. I am confident that, thanks to these novelties, EURES will adequately address the challenges related to skills mismatches on our labour markets and thus contribute to the fight against unemployment in the EU." More information on the EURES regulation can be found [here](#). (For more information: Christian Wigand– Tel.: +32 229 62253; Sara Soumillion – Tel.: + 32 229 67094)