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Refugee crisis: Commission reviews 2015 actions and sets 2016 priorities

Today, the College of Commissioners discussed the refugee crisis, looking at the measures taken in 2015 and the initiatives to be presented in spring 2016. Over the past year, an unprecedented rise in the number of people seeking international protection in Europe proved a major test for the Common European Asylum System and the Schengen area. The European Commission swiftly took measures to respond to the crisis, and continues to work with Member States and third country partners to manage the flow of people, protect Europe's borders, and address the root causes of these migratory pressures. First Vice-President Frans **Timmermans** said: *"We can only get out of this crisis together. 2016 must see clear and tangible results in regaining control of irregular flows and of our borders, starting with the next weeks and months. We need to make sure hotspots are fully operational and that people who arrive are properly registered and fingerprinted, also tackling secondary movements. We must get the relocation scheme off the ground and return those who have no right to stay. We should also cooperate better with third countries to address root causes and stem the flow, as well as improve return and readmission. In 2016 we need to return to Schengen's normal functioning, and to do that we must ensure that Member States do not feel the need to introduce or prolong internal border controls. The Commission will do everything that is necessary for this to happen. In addition, we will come up with forward-looking thinking and bold steps to make sure our asylum system is future proof and to help manage migratory flows in a sustainable way."* 2016 will be dedicated to delivering clear and tangible results and implementing the agreed measures, but also continuing to shape our future policies, including by adopting the Commission's announced proposals as soon as possible. The EU must step up its efforts in the fields of relocation, resettlement, hotspots, returns, and the establishment of a European Border and Coast Guard. In addition, the Commission will submit a proposal on the revision of the Dublin System by March, prepare a package of measures on legal migration and present a package on migrant smuggling by the end of 2016. To reduce the reliance on irregular routes, the Commission is also preparing a package of measures on legal migration. Finally, the Commission's recommendation for a voluntary humanitarian admission scheme with Turkey should be complemented with actions on the ground as well as a more structured framework for resettlement; and in regards to the external dimension of the crisis, partnerships and cooperation with key countries of origin, transit and destination will continue to be a focus. More information is available in this [press release](#). (For more information: Tove Ernst – Tel.: +32 229 86764; Tim McPhie – Tel.: +32 229 58602; Markus Lammert – Tel.: +32 229 80423)

Commission provides additional support for fingerprinting of migrants in Greece

The European Commission has informed Greece of its decision to award €1.36 million in emergency funding for the acquisition of 90 fingerprinting devices. These devices will be used to ensure proper identification and registration of migrants at Greek border crossings. This emergency funding comes from the [Internal Security Fund](#) (ISF). The 90 fingerprinting devices and workstations will be connected to the central [EURODAC](#) system to ensure sharing of information, and will be installed at border crossing points throughout the country, including on the Eastern Aegean islands. This will help to ensure the full and effective operation of the hotspots established on the islands of Lesbos, Chios, Leros, Kos and Samos. This emergency assistance is part of the Commission's overall efforts to support concrete and effective actions in Member States facing high migratory pressure. For 2016, the Commission has foreseen emergency financial assistance, available to all Member States, of €55.9 million under the ISF programme and €133 million under the [Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund](#) (AMIF). This is in addition to the national AMIF and ISF programmes for all Member States. For Greece the national programme amounts to around €509 million for 2014-2020, of which €33 million has already been paid. The Commission's award decision will be followed by the signature of the grant agreement with the Greek authorities, which should take place in the following days. (For more information: Tove Ernst – Tel.: +32 229 86764; Tim McPhie – Tel.: +32 229 58602; Markus Lammert – Tel.: +32 229 80423)

College of Commissioners discusses recent developments in Poland and the Rule of Law Framework

Today, the College of Commissioners held a first orientation debate on recent developments in Poland and the Rule of Law. The Rule of Law is one of the fundamental values upon which the European Union is founded. The Commission, beyond its task to ensure the respect of EU law, is also responsible, together with the European Parliament, the Member States and the Council, for guaranteeing the fundamental values of the Union. Recent events in Poland, in particular the political and legal dispute concerning the composition of the Constitutional Tribunal, have given rise to concerns regarding the respect of the rule of law. The Commission had therefore requested information on the situation concerning the Constitutional Tribunal and on the changes in the law on the Public Service Broadcasters. Following a presentation by First Vice-President Timmermans (responsible for the rule of law framework), Commissioner Oettinger (responsible for media policy) and Commissioner Jourova (responsible for justice), the College held a first debate on these developments in order to assess the situation in Poland under the Rule of Law Framework. Following today's orientation debate, the College mandated First Vice-President Timmermans to send a letter to the Polish government in order to start the structured dialogue under the Rule of Law Framework. The College agreed to come back to the matter by mid-March, in close cooperation with the Venice Commission. More information is available in a [memo](#). (For more information: Mina Andreeva – Tel.: +32 229 91382; Christian Wigand – Tel.: +32 229 62253; Tim McPhie – Tel.: +32 229 58602)

Mergers: Commission opens in-depth investigation into acquisition of oilfield service provider Baker Hughes by Halliburton

The European Commission has opened an in-depth investigation to assess whether the proposed acquisition of oilfield service supplier Baker Hughes by rival Halliburton would impede effective competition in breach of the EU Merger Regulation. Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said: *"The Commission has to look closely at this proposed takeover to make sure that it would not reduce choice or push up prices for oil and gas exploration and production services in the EU. Efficient exploration and production of oil and gas resources within the EU form an important element of our Energy Union strategy in terms of ensuring security of supply."* The takeover would bring together the world's second and third largest oilfield service suppliers, thus eliminating one of the three current main global competitors (i.e. Halliburton, Baker Hughes and market leader Schlumberger). The opening of an in-depth inquiry does not prejudice the final result of the investigation. The Commission now has 90 working days, until 26 May 2016, to take a final decision. The full press release is available online in [EN](#), [FR](#) and [DE](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Carolina Luna Gordo – Tel.: +32 229 68386)

Mergers: Commission clears acquisition of Nordex by Acciona

The European Commission has approved under the EU Merger Regulation the acquisition of Nordex SE of Germany by Acciona of Spain. Nordex is mainly engaged in the manufacture and marketing of wind turbines. Acciona is a diversified multinational conglomerate, with interests in areas such as infrastructure, construction and energy services. The Commission concluded that the proposed acquisition would raise no competition concerns, because the companies have a limited position on the market for the manufacturing of wind turbines and they will continue to face a significant number of large competitors. The Commission also assessed whether the transaction would allow the merged entity to engage in anticompetitive behaviour in related markets such as the market for the development of wind farms and the market for the generation and wholesale of electricity. However, the Commission concluded that given the companies' limited position on all markets concerned, competitors would continue to have sufficient alternative suppliers. 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.7823](#). (For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Carolina Luna Gordo – Tel.: +32 229 68386)

EUROSTAT: Industrial production down by 0.7% in euro area

In November 2015 compared with October 2015, seasonally adjusted industrial production fell by 0.7% in the euro area (EA19) and by 0.6% in the EU28, according to estimates from Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union. In October 2015 industrial production rose by 0.8% and 0.6% respectively. In November 2015 compared with November 2014, industrial production increased by 1.1% in the euro area and by 1.4% in the EU28. A Eurostat press release can be found [here](#). (For more information: Lucia Caudet – Tel.: +32 229 56182; Heli Pietila – Tel.: +32 22964950)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

EU's upcoming musical talents to be awarded the European Border Breakers Awards

This evening, the [10 best emerging musicians in Europe](#) will be awarded the 2016 European Border Breakers Awards (EBBA) during a ceremony at the Eurosonic Noorderslag festival in Groningen, The Netherlands. The winners will receive trophies recognising their musical talent and cross-border chart success with their first international release in Europe. First Vice-President **Frans Timmermans**, who will open the ceremony and present the Public Choice Award, said: *"Tonight we honour the musical stars of tomorrow that will touch the lives of millions of Europeans. With the EBBA awards we want to celebrate cultural diversity across Europe and help to make the most of music's creative and economic potential."* **Tibor Navracsics**, Commissioner for Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, said: *"My warmest congratulations to this year's winners! I am proud that with the Creative Europe Programme, which co-funds the EBBA awards, we are helping young European musical talent find audiences all over Europe and make sure their music is heard across borders."* Previous winners of the awards have included such acts as Adele, Stromae, Caro Emerald and Lykke Li, to name just a few. The winners of this year's awards, which were announced in their respective countries late last year, are selected based on sales, broadcast frequency and votes cast by radio stations and festival organisers. Tonight's ceremony will be hosted by TV personality and musician Jools Holland and will be broadcast via various TV and radio stations across Europe. (For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt – Tel.: +32 229 67083; Mirna Talko – Tel.: +32 229 87278)

Commissioner Arias Cañete in Poland for energy and climate talks

Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy Miguel **Arias Cañete** will travel tomorrow, 14 January, to Warsaw for energy and climate talks with the new elected Polish Government. The meetings on Thursday and Friday will focus on energy security, clean energy, EU energy and climate legislation and the implementation of [the Paris Agreement](#). The Commissioner will meet with Minister of Environment, Jan Szyszko, the Minister of Energy, Krzysztof Tchórzewski, the Minister for European Affairs, Konrad Szymański, as well as the Secretary of State, Piotr Naimski, Plenipotentiary for the Strategic Energy Infrastructure. Commissioner **Arias Cañete** will also participate in a seminar with trade unions, industry, consumers associations, and environmental organisations. (For more information: Anna-Kaisa Itkonen - Tel.: +32 229 56186)

Commissioner Mimica on official visit to Guatemala for Presidential inauguration

On 14 January, EU Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven **Mimica**, will attend the Presidential inauguration of Jimmy Morales, elected President of Guatemala. The visit sends a signal of support at a key moment for Guatemala. The Commissioner will also take the opportunity to visit one of the EU-funded projects in the area of justice sector reform in the city of Antigua. This project has increased access to justice to the Guatemalan population, particularly to vulnerable parts of the population, such as women and indigenous people. Ahead of his visit, Commissioner **Mimica** said: *"The EU wants to be a solid and trustful partner of Guatemala. We are committed to supporting Guatemala and its new Government in addressing the main long-term challenges of the country. Our cooperation and support amount to €186 million and will focus on food security, conflict resolution, peace, security and competitiveness"*. More information about EU-Guatemala cooperation can be found [here](#). (For more information: Alexandre Polack - Tel.: +32 2 299 06 77, Sharon Zarb – Tel.: + 32 2 29 92256)

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