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SOCIAL AFFAIRS

SOCIAL: digital platform workers, Member States once again reject provisional agreement reached with European Parliament

Brussels, 16/02/2024 (Agence Europe)

The Member States once again rejected, on Friday 16 February, the agreement reached with the European Parliament on 8 February on the digital platform workers directive (*see EUROPE 13347/8* (</en/bulletin/article/13347/8>)).

Although Spain and Italy, whose votes were also being observed, were finally able to rally behind the latest text, the weight of Germany and France, as well as Estonia and Greece, enabled them to form a blocking minority.

Germany had long made known its intention to abstain, as its coalition government had been deadlocked on this issue for months, but did not seek a solution or try to change the discussions in Brussels, which also angered some of its partners.

Nor was there any miracle on the Paris side, which was eagerly awaited because it could also pivot the majority, but which has always been sceptical about this directive. On Friday, France indicated that it was “*not in a position to support this draft agreement as it stands*” and opted to abstain, according to French sources, although other sources interpreted Paris’s position as yet another ‘no’ vote.

With this latest rejection, the second in two months following an initial setback under the Spanish Presidency of the EU Council on 22 December (*see EUROPE 13320/14* (</en/bulletin/article/13320/14>)), the fate of this directive – presented at the end of 2021 by the Commission to improve the lot of 28 million platform workers by reclassifying them as employees if they are bogus self-employed – is back in the dark.

The Belgian Presidency of the EU Council has indicated that it will now reflect on the next steps, but the legislature is coming to an end. And while there is still a possibility of reaching an agreement before mid-March between the Council of the EU and the European Parliament under the so-called ‘corrigendum procedure’, Parliament will also have to give its approval for work to continue. At the end of the meeting, the Belgian Presidency had in any case not indicated any trends for the future.

For the French government, the latest text did not provide an applicable legal framework as it stood, with Paris citing as a source of uncertainty the fact that the Commission this week had to explain the notion of the effectiveness of the legal presumption, while also announcing a support group for transposition, thus proving that the text remains imprecise, sources reported.

France is also said to have pointed out as a difficulty the fact that there could be an obligation of result with the presumption of salaried status as formulated in the text, whereas it should remain an objective.

Paris reportedly raised as well the issue of the coexistence of 27 different national regimes, raising the question of the disparity of legal regimes and the Commission's interpretation of them, with appeals to the Court of Justice of the EU at the time of transposition.

As for Spain, Austria and Bulgaria, they have accompanied their endorsement of this latest text with a statement criticising its lowered ambitions and the risks to the level playing field between Member States.

"The Spanish delegation's vote is an exercise in responsibility, given that a large majority of Member States, political groups in the European Parliament and European trade unions support the provisional agreement. However, the Spanish delegation would like to point out that certain provisions of the approved text do not fully comply with what we believe to be the content of this directive", stated Madrid.

"According to our assessment, the text establishes a weak and unambitious presumption of work, which is the central element of the directive, which is contrary to what the Spanish delegation has always defended since the start of negotiations on this proposal for a directive more than two years ago. The provisional agreement reached in December during the trilogues under the Spanish Presidency established a stronger presumption with employment criteria and a common application threshold throughout the EU. It was more respectful of workers' rights and more useful in guaranteeing the correct classification of jobs".

A disappointed Commission

"It is deeply disappointing that the EU Member States were not able to vote through the platform work directive today. The Commission still firmly believes in the need to improve gig workers' terms and conditions, and create a level playing field across the Union", reacted European Commissioner Nicolas Schmit on X.

"Liberal and conservative forces in France, Estonia, Greece and Germany wasted a historic opportunity to protect all workers in the digital era. They chose big platforms' economic interests over European citizens, the European social model and the future of work", was the reaction of the S&D Group in the European Parliament and of the rapporteur Elisabetta Gualmini (Italian).

"The overwhelming majority of Member States have been prevented from introducing protection for delivery drivers, ride-hailing drivers and care assistants, among others", said the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). *"Millions of workers will continue to be forced into bogus self-employment".*

For the platforms, discussions must be suspended

For its part, *Move EU*, which represents UBER in particular, said that this latest rejection *"confirms that Member States do not want to approve a deal that would have created more legal uncertainty for the hundreds of thousands of ride-hailing drivers in Europe who rely on platforms to generate revenues. It is now high time to pause the discussions and assess after European elections if there is any support for this text for which no agreement has been found in three years and which is not supported by those who would be impacted in the first place".*

Links to the texts of the rejected agreement and the Spanish declaration: <https://aeur.eu/f/awi>; <https://aeur.eu/f/awi>; <https://aeur.eu/f/awh>; <https://aeur.eu/f/awh>; <https://aeur.eu/f/awg> <https://aeur.eu/f/awg> (Original version in French by Solenn Paulic)

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EXTERNAL ACTION

MIDDLE EAST: EU "very concerned" about Israeli plans for possible operation in Rafah
Brussels, 16/02/2024 (Agence Europe)

On Friday 16 February, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, underlined the EU's deep concern about the Israeli government's plans for a possible ground operation in Rafah, where more than a million Palestinians are currently taking shelter from the fighting.

This declaration, which was initially intended to be made on behalf of the EU27, was supported by 26 Member States, but rejected by Hungary.

While recognising Israel's right to defend itself in accordance with international law and international humanitarian law, the High Representative called on the Israeli government not to take military action in Rafah *“that would worsen an already catastrophic humanitarian situation and prevent the urgently needed provision of basic services and humanitarian assistance”*.

“The EU reiterates the importance of ensuring the protection of all civilians at all times in line with International Humanitarian Law and to respect the 26 January order of the International Court of Justice, which is legally binding”, warned Mr Borrell.

He also reiterated the EU's call to *Hamas* to release all the hostages immediately and unconditionally.

The situation in the Middle East will be discussed by the European foreign ministers at their Council meeting on Monday 19 February (see other news). *(Original version in French by Camille-Cerise Gessant)*

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EXTERNAL ACTION

FOREIGN AFFAIRS: Middle East, Ukraine and Sahel on agenda of Council of European Foreign Ministers *Brussels, 16/02/2024 (Agence Europe)*

The European foreign affairs ministers will meet in Brussels on Monday 19 February to discuss, once again, the situation in Ukraine and the Middle East. The situation in the Sahel will also be discussed.

Middle East. The EU Council will discuss the situation in the Middle East, first between ministers and then with the United Nations Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator for Gaza, Sigrid Kaag.

The ministers are expected to discuss the increasingly catastrophic humanitarian situation in Gaza, which could get even worse in the event of an Israeli offensive on Rafah (see other news).

The situation of UNRWA, which is facing allegations concerning the involvement of around ten of its employees in the attacks of 7 October 2023, and the resulting financial risks, should be addressed. The Member States are divided over the funding of the UN agency. At the end of the month, the Commission could disburse the €82 million in support for UNRWA in 2024 *(see EUROPE 13348/1 (/en/bulletin/article/13348/1))*.

The EU Council is also expected to discuss the sanctions being prepared against members or supporters of *Hamas* on the one hand, and violent settlers on the other. Sanctions on violent settlers are still the subject of disagreement, as some Member States do not want *Hamas* and the settlers to be placed back to back in the sequencing of the adoption of restrictive measures. Hungary is said to be against measures.

The ministers could come back to the letter from Spain and Ireland asking the Commission to analyse whether Israel is respecting the principles of its association agreement with the EU *(see EUROPE 13350/1 (/en/bulletin/article/13350/1))* and, if not, to consider measures. While the EU High Representative called on the Hebrew State's allies on Monday 12 February to stop sending it arms *(see EUROPE 13348/2 (/en/bulletin/article/13348/2))*, a possible European embargo or a limitation on shipments is not likely to be discussed. Several delegations pointed out that sending military equipment to Israel was a national decision, and some spoke out against a possible embargo.

Finally, the ministers could discuss the post-conflict situation and continue discussions on the High Representative's proposals for the resumption of political dialogue, with a view to the two-state solution *(see EUROPE 13333/1 (/en/bulletin/article/13333/1))*.

The EU Council is expected to adopt the launch of Operation *EUNAVFOR Aspides* in the Red Sea *(see EUROPE 13348/6 (/en/bulletin/article/13348/6))*, aimed at protecting maritime trade from Houthi attacks. It should be fully operational in a few weeks' time, according to several sources. A European source hoped to have at least four ships, three of which were already assured (Greece, Italy and France). While the headquarters are in Greece, discussions are still underway with Djibouti concerning a logistical support point in Djibouti.

Ukraine. During their lunch, the ministers will once again consider the Russian aggression against Ukraine, just a few days before the 2nd anniversary of the invasion. After a traditional – virtual – exchange with their Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kulebo, the European heads of diplomacy will discuss the 13th package of sanctions.

Although the EU Council had initially hoped to see the proposal adopted, at a discussion between ambassadors on Wednesday 14 February Hungary said it needed more time to study the content of the proposals.

The aim is to adopt this thirteenth package on the 2nd anniversary of the invasion, on 24 February. *“The proposal on the table is one of the largest since the start of the war, with almost 200 people and entities listed”*, said a European source. The aim is for the Member States’ ambassadors to reach agreement on Wednesday 21, with a view to adoption in time for 24 February.

The ministers are also expected to discuss military support, including the Ukraine component of the European Peace Facility, known as the ‘Ukraine Assistance Facility’. While European leaders have called for an agreement to be reached by early March (see [EUROPE 13341/2 \(/en/bulletin/article/13341/2\)](#)), the Member States are still unable to agree on the details. Germany continues to want to take bilateral contributions into account, and France wants priority to be given to the industrial basis and technicality of European defence which other Member States dispute. The ‘Ukraine Assistance Facility’ will be a component of the EU’s security commitment offer to Ukraine, said a senior official, announcing that the EU High Representative had received very good feedback from the Ukrainians on the first draft of the security commitments.

Sahel. The ministers will continue their discussion on the situation in the Sahel and the modalities of the EU’s future engagement with this strategic region, seeking to agree on the modalities of flexible engagement, on a case-by-case basis, with the various countries.

The discussion will be guided by a second options non-paper, prepared by the European External Action Service, to sketch out avenues and supplement the one that provided food for thought for the ministers in December (see [EUROPE 13311/5 \(/en/bulletin/article/13311/5\)](#)).

Since then, Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger have unilaterally withdrawn from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a move regretted by EU High Representative Josep Borrell on behalf of the EU27 (see [EUROPE 13341/19 \(/en/bulletin/article/13341/19\)](#)).

“The aim is to take stock of the situation on the ground over the last two years and to adapt relations with Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger politically, diplomatically and in terms of military presence”, a senior European official stressed on Friday, pointing out that the situation has been in flux since the first meeting of European defence and foreign affairs ministers in Toledo in August 2023.

“Discussions are continuing, but it is difficult to predict the outcome. There is agreement not to withdraw from the Sahel. Our interests are very important. We must continue our commitment. The question is how we organise this commitment”, according to a senior EU diplomat.

The aim of the discussion is *“to see how we can arrive at a convergent approach for this region of the world, where there is a convergence of views on common issues, migration, the fight against terrorism, and avoiding contagion”*, stressed another European diplomat.

He added that, for countries with which relations are difficult, a transactional approach could be envisaged. *“There may be nuances on the instruments – CSDP missions and development aid instruments – but we must try to agree on a collective, unified approach”*.

Belarus. In addition, the ministers will shortly be taking stock of the situation in Belarus, just a few days before the elections and at a time when the repression of opponents continues unabated (see [EUROPE 13336/33 \(/en/bulletin/article/13336/33\)](#)). They are expected to adopt conclusions on the subject.

Russia. The death on Friday 16 February of Russian political opponent Alexei Navalny could also be mentioned by the EU High Representative and certain ministers (see other news).

Nuclear. The EU Council will be preceded by a breakfast with the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Rafael Grossi. The discussion is expected to focus on Iran, which is no longer honouring its commitments under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and on the nuclear risks in Ukraine. (Original version in French by Camille-Cerise Gessant with Aminata Niang)

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EXTERNAL ACTION

TRADE: unfair foreign subsidies – European Commission opens in-depth investigation into Chinese subsidy
Brussels, 16/02/2024 (Agence Europe)

On Friday, 16 February, the European Commission announced that it was opening its first in-depth investigation under its regulation on unfair foreign subsidies. It is targeting a state-owned Chinese company that manufactures trains and that took part in a Bulgarian public tender for the provision of 20 electric trains. The value of this public contract is estimated to be €610 million.

The Chinese company ‘*CRRC Qingdao Sifang Locomotive Co., Ltd.*’, notified the European Commission on 22 January that it was participating in the public tender, in accordance with the terms of the Foreign Subsidies Regulation.

In force since 12 July 2023, this regulation requires companies that participate in a public tender where the value of the contract exceeds €250 million and that have received a foreign financial contribution of at least €4 million to notify the European Commission that they are participating in the tender (*see EUROPE 13219/5 (/en/bulletin/article/13219/5)*).

Following a preliminary review, the European Commission believes that the Chinese company’s participation is likely to put other bidders at a disadvantage. According to the procedure provided for in the regulation, the European Commission has 110 working days starting from the [date of] notification (22 January) to deliver its decision, i.e. until 2 July.

It will have three options: accept the commitments that the company has proposed to remedy the problem, prohibit the public contract from being awarded to this company, or decide not to oppose the company’s participation [in the tender].

“Ensuring that our EU Single Market is not distorted by foreign subsidies to the detriment of competitive firms that play fair is vital for our competitiveness and economic security,” declared European Commissioner for the Internal Market Thierry Breton when announcing the opening of the investigation. (*Original version in French by Léa Marchal*)

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EXTERNAL ACTION

TRADE: farming organisations call on EU to tighten import restrictions on Ukrainian products
Brussels, 16/02/2024 (Agence Europe)

On Thursday 15 February, six EU farming organisations expressed the view that the European Commission’s proposal to better control the influx of Ukrainian products into the EU (*see EUROPE 13350/4 (/en/bulletin/article/13350/4)*) was insufficient.

At the end of January, the Commission proposed to renew for one additional year, from June, the exemption from customs duties granted to Ukraine since the spring of 2022 to support the country at war (*see EUROPE 13340/7 (/en/bulletin/article/13340/7)*). The Commission has proposed safeguard measures to limit the impact of imports. Corrective measures could be adopted in the event of major market disturbances and, for three products (poultry, eggs and sugar), an emergency brake would stabilise imports at the average import volumes in 2022-2023, beyond which customs duties would be re-imposed.

This text, which is now being reviewed by the Member States and MEPs, is not satisfactory for *Copa-Cogeca* and five European organisations representing key sectors (sugar beet, grain/oilseeds, poultry, eggs).

“Should the Commission’s proposed text remain unamended, the economic sustainability of the EU’s poultry, eggs, sugar, grain, and honey sectors would be jeopardised” under pressure from cheap Ukrainian competition, the organisations warn.

Regarding the proposed ceilings for three products, they deplore that *“it is precisely these volumes that have contributed”* to the current crisis, while no restrictions are planned (automatically) for grain and honey, despite Ukraine’s significant production capacity. *“Unfortunately, it appears that the Council and the European Parliament are not inclined to take action. This approach will fail to address the concerns of farmers currently protesting and will likely lead to further demonstrations”*, or even new *“unilateral bans”* in border countries, warn the organisations.

Farmers in Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia are currently selling their produce at around 40% below the market price, assuming they can sell it at all, they claim. This is a problem that is *“begun to affect other Member States such as France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, and Austria, where producers of grains, poultry, and sugar are experiencing significant pressure”* from exports that are *“failing to meet our environmental and social standards [and] driving agricultural prices downward”*. (Original version in French by Lionel Changeur)

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SECTORAL POLICIES

TRANSPORT: EU Council-European Parliament agreement on combating pollution from ships
Brussels, 16/02/2024 (Agence Europe)

On Thursday 15 February, negotiators from the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament reached a provisional agreement on the revision of the Directive on ship-source pollution (see *EUROPE 13351/29* (</en/bulletin/article/13351/29>)).

“The seas and oceans are our common good. These new rules will set the EU to the forefront when it comes to clean shipping”, commented Paul Van Tigchelt, Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Justice and the North Sea, in a press release.

“We found a compromise that will ensure cleaner seas in Europe while at the same time providing a level playing field for a dynamic shipping industry”, he added.

The aim of this revision is to extend the scope of the directive to cover illegal discharges of harmful substances in packaged form, sewage, garbage and discharged waters and residues, and to establish a stronger legal framework for penalties and enforcement. MEPs succeeded in securing a requirement for the EU to review the rules five years after their transposition into national law, to assess whether marine plastic waste, lost containers and discharges of plastic pellets from ships should also be subject to sanctions.

The revised directive thus incorporates international standards into Community law, ensuring that those responsible for illegal discharges of polluting substances are subject to dissuasive, effective and proportionate penalties.

More surveillance

The revision establishes a strengthened legal framework for penalties and their effective enforcement, enabling national authorities to ensure dissuasive and consistent application of penalties for ship-source pollution incidents in all European seas. It introduces a number of changes to ensure clarity and consistency with international rules and procedures, in particular those of the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL), in the interests of protecting the marine environment.

The agreement also separates the administrative sanctions regime from the criminal sanctions regime provided for in the new draft directive on environmental crime (see *EUROPE 13294/4* (</en/bulletin/article/13294/4>)), taking into account the differences between the legal systems of the Member States.

Finally, as requested by the European Parliament, EU countries and the European Commission will be communicating more on pollution incidents, best practices for combating pollution and follow-up measures, following the alerts issued by the European satellite-based oil spill and ship detection system, *‘CleanSeaNet’*.

The agreement provides for digital monitoring of all high-reliability *CleanSeaNet* alerts, with a target of at least 25% being verified by the national competent authorities. A degree of flexibility has been introduced, to avoid imposing an excessive administrative burden and to recognise the diversity of situations in the Member States in terms of geographical location, resources and capacities.

“Member states must not falter in their duty to safeguard our marine environment. We need a concentrated effort, utilising advanced technologies like satellite monitoring and on-site inspections, to stamp out illegal discharges effectively”, reacted European Parliament rapporteur Marian-Jean Marinescu (EPP, Romanian), in a press release.

The provisional agreement must be approved by the European Parliament and the EU Council before coming into force. Member States will then have 30 months to transpose the provisions into their national legislation. This directive is part of the maritime safety package. The revised directive on the investigation of maritime accidents, which is also included in the package, was agreed on Tuesday 13 February (*see EUROPE 13349/6 (/en/bulletin/article/13349/6)*). (Original version in French by Anne Damiani)

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SECTORAL POLICIES

DIGITAL: after very large online platforms and search engines, DSA is extending to rest of platforms and intermediaries

Brussels, 16/02/2024 (Agence Europe)

Hitherto limited to the 22 very large online platforms and search engines designated by the Commission in August and December 2023, the Digital Services Act (DSA) (*see EUROPE 13346/17 (/en/bulletin/article/13346/17)*) will begin to apply to all other online platforms and intermediaries on Saturday 17 February. The monitoring of companies such as *LeBonCoin*, *eBay*, *BeReal* and *Vinted* will now be in the hands of the national coordinators, who will meet formally for the first time on Monday 19 February.

All the platforms concerned – with the exception of companies employing fewer than 50 people and with an annual turnover of less than €10 million – will be subject to the requirements of the DSA, starting with the ban on targeting minors with ads based on profiling or personal data, the ban on targeting people on the basis of sensitive data, such as their political or religious beliefs, and the obligation to provide a statement of the reasons leading to the removal of online content.

Users will also be able to use a complaints mechanism to challenge content moderation procedures, and companies will have to publish a report on the subject at least once a year.

“Companies will also have to continue to publish the number of users, because a change in this could move them into the category of very large online platforms or search engines”, said a European Commission official.

For their part, the Member States will have to start supervising these companies through their digital services coordinators (*see EUROPE 13317/10 (/en/bulletin/article/13317/10)*, *13341/28 (/en/bulletin/article/13341/28)*). Among other things, the coordinators will be able to order inspections in the event of suspected infringements of the regulations, impose fines in the event of failure to comply with the rules, and take interim measures in the event of *“serious harm”* to the public sphere.

Cases will be handled based on the country of origin principle. The national coordinators appointed by the Member States, 20 of whom are responsible for telecommunications regulation in their respective countries and four for competition, will be able to work together with other competent authorities when the case falls outside their area of expertise.

Where the company suspected of non-compliance has no representative within the EU, any national authority designated under the DSA will be able to initiate proceedings. It must inform its counterparts.

The coordinators will also be responsible for awarding and assessing ‘trusted flagger’ status, as well as certifying content moderation complaint and challenge mechanisms.

“We have been in touch with them a lot”, said a Commission official. *“We’ve already met with them four times, and they’ve started work on various matters. (...) The Commission is the sole assessor, but for problematic cases, it is the Member State of origin that will deal with the case”*, she added. (Original version in French by Thomas Mangin)

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SECTORAL POLICIES

INTERNAL MARKET: at European Parliament, payment periods continue to be subject of debate just a few days before vote on report in committee

Brussels, 16/02/2024 (Agence Europe)

MEPs on the Internal Market Committee (IMCO) will vote on Thursday 22 February on the report by Róża Thun Und Hohenstein (*Renew Europe*, Polish), regarding payment periods. The groups agreed on a series of compromise amendments, to which *EUROPE* had access. However, the key article of the draft regulation relating to payment periods is the subject of an alternative compromise amendment supported by the EPP and ECR groups.

The Commission's proposal to limit payment periods to 30 days for companies and public authorities was adopted by the rapporteur and supported by most of the groups, subject to a few adjustments.

Some MEPs were calling for flexibility for certain sectors, and a compromise was reached to this effect: the initial payment period could be extended by 30 days for purchases of "*certain slow-moving and seasonal goods*". It would be up to the European Commission to adopt a delegated act listing the products in question, according to the compromise amendments.

Another element of flexibility is that the current directive on payment periods will continue to apply for two years to micro-enterprises and the self-employed when they are in debt. This means that they will still be able to sign contractual clauses with their creditors for longer periods.

However, not all SMEs on the continent are convinced by these provisions, and some want more flexibility. This is why the EPP and the ECR will table an alternative compromise amendment, which *EUROPE* has consulted. This allows companies to negotiate an additional payment period of 30 days for commercial transactions (except when the creditor is an SME and the debtor a large company).

To regulate the use of this extra time, the two political groups want to use the concept of '*grossly unfair*' contracts. However, this concept, which is present in the current directive, is the subject of debate. It has proved ineffective in protecting creditors because it is difficult to obtain recognition.


Penalties for late payers

The compromise amendments negotiated between the political groups also modify the Commission's proposal regarding compensation to be paid in the event of failure to meet deadlines. Rather than compensation of €50 per bill, MEPs are proposing a tariff that varies according to the value of the transaction: €50 for transactions under €1,500; then €100 for transactions between €1,500 and €15,000; and finally €150 for transactions over €15,000.

Implementation

In their compromise amendments, MEPs require large companies and contracting public authorities to report their payment patterns once a year to the implementing authorities.

In addition, a European observatory on late payments should be set up, according to MEPs, in addition to the existing payment observatory.

To see the compromise amendments: <https://aeur.eu/f/awc>  (<https://aeur.eu/f/awc>) (*Original version in French by Léa Marchal*)

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SECTORAL POLICIES

RESEARCH: with *Brussels Declaration*, Belgian Presidency of EU Council intends to promote global approach and open cooperation in R&I

Brussels, 16/02/2024 (Agence Europe)

On 15 and 16 February, the Belgian Presidency of the EU Council organised a high-level multilateral dialogue on the principles and values of cooperation in research and innovation (R&I). The event consisted of a series of workshops involving a large number of stakeholders who were able to discuss and share their experiences.

The Member States were invited, as well as the European institutions, the European Commissioner for Research, Iliana Ivanova, and the countries associated with *Horizon Europe* or in the process of being associated.

International organisations also took part in the dialogue, including the OECD, represented by its Deputy Secretary-General, Ulrik Vestergaard Knudsen, and the International Council for Science, represented by Sir Peter Glucksman.

This multilateral dialogue culminated in a ministerial declaration, the '*Brussels Declaration*', in which the ministers, among other things, recognised the importance of R&I, the strengthening of international cooperation in R&I and the importance of cooperation based on shared principles and values. This declaration remains open to the participation of new countries.

Ambassador Ghislain D'hoop, acting Political Director General at Belgian Foreign Ministry, said that the meeting had been organised by the Belgian Presidency on the principle of the "*global approach*" and "*stronger together*". He felt that the culture of open cooperation should become a reflex in R&I, while remaining fully aligned with equity and security.

Signe Ratso, Acting Director-General of the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation of the European Commission, stressed that by seeking to establish a common understanding of what these values and principles were, the dialogue could provide a kind of roadmap.

Ms Ratso pointed out that the process leading up to this dialogue had already begun with the Commission's communication on the EU's global approach to R&I (COM(2021) 252 final) and had been continued with a ministerial meeting organised by the French Presidency of the EU Council in March 2022.

Looking to the future of the process, she pointed out that it is a long-term, flexible process, which is not guided by the Commission, but which will be fed by the reflections developing in the participating countries.

Ms Ratso also stressed the importance, in a polarised world, particularly since Russia's full-scale military aggression against Ukraine, of forging partnerships with countries that share the same values.

Other values and principles identified include academic freedom, inclusiveness, gender equality, ethics and the protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights.

Finally, Mr D'hoop stressed the need to maintain the *sustainable* and coherent nature of this dialogue. Ms Ratso added that these values were not just European, but universal.

Link to the Declaration: <https://aeur.eu/f/awf>  (<https://aeur.eu/f/awf>) (*Original version in French by Émilie Vanderhulst*)

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SECTORAL POLICIES

AGRICULTURE: Belgian Presidency of EU Council is asking about short- and medium-term measures to respond to crisis

Brussels, 16/02/2024 (Agence Europe)

On Monday 26 February, the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union is calling on EU agriculture ministers to vote in favour of short- and medium-term measures to help farmers overcome the current crisis.

A note from the Belgian Presidency reminds us that the Agriculture Council has been mandated by the European Council to respond to farmers' concerns (*see EUROPE 13341/4* (</en/bulletin/article/13341/4>)).

The document also details some of the recent or forthcoming measures taken by the Commission (derogation from set-aside rules, safeguard measures with regard to imports of Ukrainian agricultural products into the EU) and refers to the 'strategic dialogue' launched on the future of EU agriculture (*see EUROPE 13349/3* (</en/bulletin/article/13349/3>)).

The Belgian Presidency notes that it has requested contributions from Member States on measures to simplify the rules of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The European Commission must also come up with ideas.

In order to structure the ministerial debate on 26 February, the Presidency proposes a number of questions concerning: - short-term actions to reduce the administrative burden at national and European level, as well as longer-term actions to simplify the CAP rules and the provisions of other EU legislation and make them more flexible; - other actions that could be considered to address farmers' concerns (*see EUROPE 13350/17* (</en/bulletin/article/13350/17>)). (*Original version in French by Lionel Changeur*)

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SECTORAL POLICIES

HEALTH: increase in number of measles cases requires a coordinated response, according to European Commission

Brussels, 16/02/2024 (Agence Europe)

Against the backdrop of measles epidemics in several EU countries, on Friday 16 February the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) published a *threat assessment brief* showing an increasing number of cases in the European region, in areas where vaccination coverage levels are low, with groups of unvaccinated people.

Infants under 12 months of age who are too young to be immunised represent the largest risk group, with unvaccinated children under 5 years of age, immunocompromised children and adults at greater risk of serious illness and increased mortality, explains the Commission.

To interrupt transmission of this highly contagious disease, 95% or more of the population must be vaccinated with two doses of the vaccine. ECDC encourages public health authorities to maintain high vaccination coverage, to ensure surveillance, early detection, diagnosis and control of epidemics, and to raise awareness among health professionals and the public.

For European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety Stella Kyriakides, the upward trend in measles cases in Europe is a cause for concern, because the disease is highly contagious.

Link to the brief: <https://aeur.eu/f/aw8>  (<https://aeur.eu/f/aw8>) (*Original version in French by Lionel Changeur*)

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SECTORAL POLICIES

CLIMATE: EU recorded 7.1% fall in greenhouse gas emissions in Q3 of 2023, while maintaining economic stability

Brussels, 16/02/2024 (Agence Europe)

According to data from the Statistical Office of the European Union, Eurostat, published on 14 February, the European Union recorded a significant fall in its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in the third quarter of 2023, while maintaining a stable economy.


The EU's GHG emissions are estimated at 787 million tonnes of CO2 equivalent, a reduction of 7.1% compared with the same quarter of 2022, when they stood at 847 million tonnes. At the same time, the EU's gross domestic product (GDP) remained virtually unchanged, showing only a slight fall of 0.2%.

The economic sectors that contributed most to this drop were electricity and gas supply (-23.7%), households (-6.5%) and manufacturing (-4.9%). This reduction in emissions has been observed in 23 EU countries.

However, increases were recorded in Malta (+7.7%), Cyprus (+3.7%), Latvia (+3.4%) and Slovakia (+0.9%).

Of the 23 EU members that reduced their emissions, 11 also recorded a fall in their GDP, while 11 others managed to reduce their emissions while increasing their GDP.

Italy, in particular, has maintained its GDP at the same level as in the third quarter of 2022, while reducing its GHG emissions.

To see the data, go to <https://aeur.eu/f/awe>  (<https://aeur.eu/f/awe>) (*Original version in French by Nithya Paquiry*)

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SECTORAL POLICIES

CLIMATE: NGO consortium 'Together for 1.5' warns of National Energy and Climate Plans shortcomings and calls on European Commission to take action

Brussels, 16/02/2024 (Agence Europe)

The 'Together for 1.5' consortium of 14 European NGOs and associations, including *Climate Action Network Europe (CAN Europe)*, has expressed serious concerns about the current review of the National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs).

In a letter sent on Thursday 15 February to Commissioners Kadri Simson and Wopke Hoekstra, responsible for energy and climate action respectively, the NGOs stress the urgent need for the European Commission to ensure that Member States' NECPs are aligned with the EU legislative framework and the Paris Agreement.

The letter follows the Commission's latest evaluation report (*see EUROPE 13317/5 (/en/bulletin/article/13317/5)*), which highlights that current NECP projects fall far short of meeting the EU's 2030 climate and energy objectives, as set out in the European Climate Law. There is growing concern that this lack of ambition will undermine the EU's climate neutrality objective.

The European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change (ESABCC) has also urged Member States to speed up emission reductions. The consortium echoed these conclusions. A major concern is insufficient public consultation and dialogue in the NECP process.

The consortium stresses the need for the Commission to impose stricter measures, if necessary. Finally, on the same day, the NGO coalition *CAN Europe* launched a tool to monitor the progress of the NECPs.

To see the tool, go to <https://aeur.eu/f/awa>  (<https://aeur.eu/f/awa>)

To see the letter, go to <https://aeur.eu/f/awb>  (<https://aeur.eu/f/awb>) (*Original version in French by Nithya Paquiry*)

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ECONOMY - FINANCE - BUSINESS

MONEY LAUNDERING: EU Council and European Parliament will attempt to reach agreement on 22 February on the seat of future European authority AMLA

Brussels, 16/02/2024 (Agence Europe)

On Thursday 22 February, the Member States' ambassadors to the European Union (Coreper) and 27 MEPs chosen from the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON) and Civil Liberties (LIBE) committees will attempt to choose the city that will host the future 'European Anti-Money Laundering Authority' (AMLA) from the nine official candidatures: Rome, Vienna, Vilnius, Riga, Frankfurt, Dublin, Madrid, Brussels and Paris (*see EUROPE 13334/22 (/en/bulletin/article/13334/22)*).

For the first time, the European Parliament is involved in this procedure, whereas following *Brexit*, the repatriation to the EU of the European agencies – the European Banking Authority in Paris and the European Medicines Agency in Amsterdam – had been sealed solely by the Member States, following a series of votes ending in final draws (*see EUROPE 11908/1 (/en/bulletin/article/11908/1)*).

In previous EU Council nominations, a Member State had to award a total of 6 points (3, 2 or 1 point(s)) to several cities, and the city with the lowest number of votes in each vote had to withdraw until a candidate emerged. A final draw was then held to break the tie.

In Parliament, the two parliamentary committees are in the process of finalising their delegations, the composition of which is determined by the D'Hondt system for allocating seats to political groups.

Each institution could try, on its own, to arrive at a specific choice or a shortlist of preferred candidates. Interaction will be allowed to determine whether a candidate stands out from the crowd. In the end, a ballot with 54 votes would be necessary. (*Original version in French by Mathieu Bion*)

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ECONOMY - FINANCE - BUSINESS

STATE AID: European Commission approves €4 billion German scheme to support decarbonisation of certain industrial processes

Brussels, 16/02/2024 (Agence Europe)

On Friday 16 February, the European Commission announced that it had authorised a €4 billion German scheme to help companies subject to the EU Emissions Trading System, such as those in the chemistry, metal, glass and paper sectors, to decarbonise their production processes. The scheme will be partly funded by the Recovery and Resilience Facility, which is the main instrument of the *NextGenerationEU* European recovery plan.

Among the projects supported under this scheme, the European Commission lists the construction of melting tanks for glass production powered by electricity, and the replacement of traditional steel production processes by direct reduction hydrogen-powered processes.

The projects eligible for this aid must achieve a reduction in carbon emissions of 60% within 3 years and 90% within 15 years compared with the best available conventional technologies, based on the Emissions Trading System benchmarks.

Beneficiaries will be selected through a call for tenders, based on two criteria: the efficiency with which the aid is used and the speed with which emission reduction measures are implemented. *(Original version in French by Émilie Vanderhulst)*

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ECONOMY - FINANCE - BUSINESS

STATE AID: European Commission orders recovery of €33.84 million in Romanian aid and interest from *Blue Air Brussels*, 16/02/2024 (Agence Europe)

On Friday 16 February, the Commission announced that, following its in-depth investigation, it had concluded that *Blue Air's* restructuring plan was incapable of restoring the airline's long-term viability. The Commission therefore ordered the recovery of Romanian state aid totalling €33.84 million plus interest, deemed incompatible with European competition rules.

In August 2020, the Commission approved a public guarantee for *Blue Air* of around €28 million to cover the damage caused by the Covid-19 epidemic and a public guarantee of around €33.84 million for a rescue loan to cover a portion of the company's liquidity needs for the following six months.

In April 2021, Romania submitted a restructuring plan to the Commission. It also repaid the loan and took a 75% stake in *Blue Air* after the company suspended operations in September 2022. In March 2023, *Blue Air* requested the opening of pre-pack proceedings.

The Commission considered that the restructuring plan was inadequate and unrealistic. In addition, it appears that the plan was not supported by sufficient financing on the market from investors, beyond the rescue period and without causing distortions of the market in question. *(Original version in French by Émilie Vanderhulst)*

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INSTITUTIONAL

GENERAL AFFAIRS: rule of law in Poland and European Council spring summit on agenda of Ministers for European Affairs

Brussels, 16/02/2024 (Agence Europe)

On Tuesday 20 February, at the request of the Polish authorities, the EU ministers responsible for European affairs will be informed of the measures taken or planned to ensure respect for the rule of law in Poland.

The ministers will hear Polish Minister of Justice Adam Bodnar explain the commitments of Donald Tusk's new Polish government to the rule of law under the so-called 'Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union' procedure.

While the Belgian Presidency of the EU Council had indeed scheduled a hearing with Poland on the state of the rule of law for June, the Polish government did not want to wait that long, according to a diplomatic source on Friday 16 February.

The discussion will therefore focus on promises to re-establish the rule of law in the country and on the progress of the various infringement proceedings launched by the European Commission against the former *PiS* government.

The 'Tusk' government wants to get rid of the 'Article 7' procedure launched by the Commission at the end of 2017 as quickly as possible, the source added. However, the evaluation of the latter and of the other Member States will be necessary and should take place in the remaining months.

Article 7 of the Treaty states that the EU Council, acting by a qualified majority of Member States, may decide to amend or terminate the measures in response to changes in the situation which led to the imposition of the measures. However, the procedure against Poland has not yet reached the stage (Paragraph 3, Article 7) which

provides for the possibility of suspending some of the rights deriving from the application of the Treaty to the Member State in question, including the voting rights of the representative of the government of that Member State within the EU Council.

The two 'Article 7' procedures opened against Poland and Hungary remain at the preliminary stage of discussions and, at this stage, Article 7 does not provide for any specific arrangements to bring them to an end.

European Council on 21-22 March. On Tuesday, the General Affairs Council will launch preparations for the EU Spring Summit, which will include a meeting specifically devoted to the euro area. On the agenda will be issues relating mainly to foreign affairs: the EU's response to Russia's military aggression in Ukraine, European defence, the Middle East and the EU's strategic agenda up to 2030.


Aid to Ukraine and the Middle East will be discussed the day before at the Foreign Affairs Council, so there is a risk of overlap, the source admitted. In her view, "an update" of the EU's position on the Middle East is "probably necessary", with the priority being to enable humanitarian aid to be delivered to the Gaza Strip.

As requested by the EU27 at the end of December (see *EUROPE 13315/3 (/en/bulletin/article/13315/3)*), the Commission is due to present a European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) at the end of February, including a proposal for a European Defence Investment Programme (EDIP). It is on the basis of this strategy and in the light of the military situation in Ukraine and the difficulties encountered by the US in maintaining its aid to Kyiv that the European Council will be asked to provide political guidance.

At a time when Member States are reaching the limit of their own fiscal capacity, we need to step up our collective efforts to develop a European defence capability, according to our European source.

Bosnia and Herzegovina. At the invitation of the Austrian delegation, the Chairwoman of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Borjana Krišto, will have breakfast with the European ministers to discuss her country's efforts to meet the conditions set by the European Council before it decides to officially open EU accession negotiations with Bosnia-Herzegovina (see *EUROPE 13334/18 (/en/bulletin/article/13334/18)*).

Before the EU Spring Summit, the Commission is due to present a report outlining the current state of reform, which will serve as a basis for discussions between the EU27.

See the annotated agenda for the European Council on 21 and 22 March: <https://aeur.eu/f/aw7> 
 (<https://aeur.eu/f/aw7>) (Original version in French by Mathieu Bion)

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NEWS BRIEFS

STATE AID: European Commission approves €720 million French measure to prevent and repair damage in forestry sector

16/02/2024 (Agence Europe)


On Friday, 16 February, the European Commission announced that it had approved a French scheme worth €720 million. Falling under the 'forestry renewal' section of the 'France 2030' investment plan, this scheme is designed to support the forestry sector so as to fund the prevention of and restoration from damage caused to forests – specifically, damage caused by fires, natural disasters, adverse climatic events, or even events related to climate change between 2023 and 2029. Companies that pursue efforts to prevent and restore damage will receive aid in the form of direct grants covering up to 100% of eligible costs. The scheme will run until 31 December 2029. (EV)

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NEWS BRIEFS

CLIMATE: European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency launches a new tool to discover EU-funded projects related to carbon management

16/02/2024 (Agence Europe)


On Tuesday 13 February, the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA) launched a new digital tool to visualise the EU's commitments in the carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS) sector. Since 2018, the EU has allocated €2.3 billion to 84 CCUS projects, involving 534 beneficiaries in 42 countries. This initiative is also in line with the European Commission's strategy for industrial carbon

management (see *EUROPE 13344/2* (</en/bulletin/article/13344/2>)). According to the EU's climate objectives, there are plans to capture 50 million tonnes (Mt) of CO₂ annually by 2030, potentially reaching 450 Mt by 2050. This new tool aims to provide greater transparency on the distribution of EU funding and the impact of CCUS projects, as part of the EU's ongoing efforts to address climate challenges. The tool: <https://aeur.eu/f/aw9>  (<https://aeur.eu/f/aw9>) (NP)

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NEWS BRIEFS

COMPETITIVENESS: Member States approve Net-Zero Industry Act (NZIA)


16/02/24 (Agence Europe)

On Friday 16 February, the Committee of Permanent Representatives of the Member States to the EU ('Coreper') approved the provisional agreement on the Net-Zero Industry Act (NZIA), reached two weeks earlier (see *EUROPE 13344/4* (</en/bulletin/article/13344/4>), *13351/12* (</en/bulletin/article/13351/12>)). MEPs can now vote on the text in turn. The European Parliament's Industry Committee will do so on Thursday 22 February, before a vote during the final plenary session of the term in April. See the consolidated text: <https://aeur.eu/f/avi>  (<https://aeur.eu/f/avi>) (LM)

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NEWS BRIEFS

CONSUMERS: 'Empowering Consumers for Green Transition' Directive, European Parliament and EU Council on track for adoption

16/02/24 (Agence Europe)

The consolidated text of the provisional agreement between the European Parliament and the EU Council on the proposal for a directive that will empower consumers for the green transition through better protection against unfair practices and better information - a provisional agreement now endorsed by the Member States and MEPs - has been published. MEPs approved it on Thursday 15 February in parliamentary committee (IMCO), the day after it was endorsed by Member States' permanent representatives to the EU (Coreper) (see *EUROPE 13302/31* (</en/bulletin/article/13302/31>)). This future legislation provides for adequate consumer information on the durability and reparability of products, and greater protection against *greenwashing* and premature product obsolescence (amendment of the 'Consumer Rights Directive' (2011/83/EU) and the 'Unfair Commercial Practices Directive' (2005/29/EC). See the consolidated text: <https://aeur.eu/f/aw5>  (<https://aeur.eu/f/aw5>) (AN)

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NEWS BRIEFS

FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS: EU Member States confirm compromise on European disability and parking cards

16/02/2024 (Agence Europe)

On Friday 16 February, Member States' ambassadors to the European Union (Coreper I) confirmed the provisional political agreement on the directive aimed at introducing a European disability card and a European parking card for people with disabilities. This agreement, reached on 8 February (see *EUROPE 13346/12* (</en/bulletin/article/13346/12>)), aims to ensure equal access to preferential conditions for disabled people on short journeys: reduced or zero entry fees, priority access and reserved parking. Both cards, in their physical and potentially digital form, will offer conditions similar to those of national cards. They will be issued free of charge, with the option of adding the letter 'A' for people requiring specific accompaniment. The time limits for issuance are set at 90 days, except in the case of prolonged medical checks. (NP)

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NEWS BRIEFS

INDUSTRY: Member States approve emergency instrument for internal market

16/02/24 (Agence Europe)

On Friday 16 February, Member States' ambassadors to the EU ('Coreper') approved the provisional agreement on the Internal Market Emergency and Resilience Act (IMERA). The acronym 'SMEI' (for *Single Market Emergency Instrument*) was changed at the request of the European Parliament. The European Parliament's Committee on the Internal Market is due to vote on the three texts in the package (two regulations and one directive) on Thursday 22 February. (LM)

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NEWS BRIEFS

DIGITAL: Member States green-light provisional political agreement on legislation on deploying high-speed networks in EU

16/02/24 (Agence Europe)

On Friday, 16 February, Member States' permanent representatives green-lit the interinstitutional agreement on deploying high-speed networks in the EU ('*Gigabit Infrastructure Act*') (see *EUROPE 13344/5* (/en/bulletin/article/13344/5)). The European Parliament and the Council of the EU had reached a provisional political agreement on the subject on 6 February. The text still has to be approved by the European Parliament – first in the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy and then during the plenary session. The EU27 will then have to formally ratify the agreement. The piece of legislation will apply 18 months after it enters into force, with the exception of certain specific provisions that will come into effect at a later date. (TM)

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NEWS BRIEFS

MIDDLE EAST: EU condemns demolition of Fakhri Abu Diab's house in East Jerusalem

16/02/24 (Agence Europe)

On Thursday 15 February, the European Union condemned the previous day's demolition by the Israeli authorities of community leader and anti-demolition activist Fakhri Abu Diab's home in East Jerusalem, where his family had lived for generations. "*Such acts are in violation of International Humanitarian Law and undermine efforts to advance durable and lasting peace and security, which both Palestinians and Israelis deserve*", denounced the spokesperson for the European External Action Service, urging Israel to stop demolishing Palestinian homes, including in this sensitive area adjacent to the Old City. "*The priority is, and must be for all, to de-escalate a very tense situation*", they pleaded, at a time when tensions are high between Palestinians and Israelis in the West Bank. (CG)

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NEWS BRIEFS

RUSSIA: Europeans pay tribute to Alexei Navalny

16/02/2024 (Agence Europe)

On Friday, 16 February, the presidents of the European Council, the European Commission, and the European Parliament along with High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell paid tribute to Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny, who died earlier that day. Mr Borrell described Mr Navalny as "*a very brave man who dedicated his life to sav[ing] the honour of Russia, giving hope to democrats [and] civil society*". Mr Michel and Mr Borrell believe that the Russian regime is solely responsible for this death. Mr Navalny was "*slowly killed by Vladimir Putin*", added Enrique Mora, the political director of the European External Action Service (EEAS). "*The world has lost a fighter whose courage will echo through generations. [...] Russia took his freedom [and] his life, but not his dignity. His struggle for democracy lives on,*" declared Roberta Metsola. (CG)

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Op-Ed

OP-ED: Top-ten checklist to implement a 'European Innovation Stress Test' and accelerate R&I - by Olivier Joris Brussels, 16/02/2024 (Agence Europe)

The EU is losing ground to its global competitors, and this is partly due to legislation that sometimes creates unexpected barriers to research and innovation.

This is problematic since innovation is critical for achieving Europe's green and digital transitions towards sustainability, for strengthening Europe competitiveness and for delivering on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. As such, to strengthen the EU's research and innovation performance should be a key strategic priority for the next European Commission, 2024-2029.

This is why, the idea of the Belgian Presidency of the Council to introduce a European Innovation Stress Test to repair system weaknesses could become an impactful instrument for enhancing the EU's innovation ecosystem, and therefore also competitiveness. This is why, the European Economic and Social Committee has supported the idea and responded positively and came up with a number of proposals to develop a win-win instrument.

The EU provides dedicated institutions and programmes to foster research, development and innovation (RD&I). *Horizon Europe* is for instance the largest research and innovation funding programme in the world, funding

excellent research, fostering cross-sectorial and international collaboration, and enabling the development of emerging and new technologies. It is as such important for the EU to be a competitive player on the global market. In addition, The New European Innovation Agenda aims to position the EU at the forefront of innovation against the backdrop of the post-Covid-19 recovery, the European Green Deal and the conflict in Ukraine. The Commission's idea to leverage regulatory experimentation ('sandboxes'), regional ecosystems, human talent and access to finance, which was relaunched in 2023 under the Green Deal Industrial Plan, was a welcomed step. Despite these important commitments and policy initiatives to support European innovation, the EU's performance has and continues to improve at a lower rate than key global competitors such as the US and China, and there is a worrying trend of losing further ground against them.

Now it's the time for EU initiatives to stimulate, rather than discourage, investment in innovation. Only then Europe will be able to make full use of the power of innovation to enable the green and digital transitions, to achieve long-term competitiveness, and to help ensure a high standard of life for all Europeans.

So, how could this be done? Employers, trade unions and civil society organisations argue that EU and national authorities need to ensure positive framework conditions which are conducive to promoting R&D activities and attracting investment for all types of innovation in Europe.

Framework conditions for innovation are important for actors in both private and public sectors of all sizes, from individual innovators, universities, spin-offs, start-ups, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and larger national and international organisations, across the full spectrum, from traditional low-tech sectors to fast-growth high-tech sectors.

Multiple conditions need to be fulfilled, including access to sufficient workforce and talent, sufficient financial support and capital markets, and positive attitudes toward technological risk-taking. In addition, lifelong education and the appropriate involvement of the social partners will be important. The European Commission needs to identify key strengths and weaknesses of the European innovation landscape, and how best to overcome these. A practical solution for ensuring an innovation-friendly landscape would be to create a checklist, against which future policy initiatives and revision of existing legislation should be evaluated, on a routine basis. This would help to verify that new policy initiatives do not unintentionally create obstacles or barriers to investment in innovation in the EU.

The EESC believes that this "top 10" checklist should take a holistic view, including availability of talent, gender equality, consistency with present or future tax incentives for innovation, while also taking into account the best available weight of scientific evidence.

There may be good reasons why existing or draft legislation does not fulfil one or more of these "Top 10" points on the checklist, but in such cases, policymakers would need to adapt the proposal or justify why and how unintended negative impact on innovation would be avoided.

The EESC Stress Test provides practical and easily implementable guidance for policymakers, complementing existing frameworks (including the 'Innovation Principle' and the 'better regulation tool-box'). Of course, the tool will only be able to have a positive impact on European innovation if the European Commission systematically uses it and monitors its application. In addition, that the tool could have an equally positive impact if used by policymakers in EU member states, and even at regional and local levels.

Europe needs all hands-on deck to remove obstacles to innovation, to make the EU the most attractive region in the world for innovation. It would be a great boost for innovation if the next European Commission could adopt and promote use of the European Innovation Stress Test, for systematically reviewing existing and evaluating each new legislative and policy initiative. This would also set a good example for Member States and regions to do likewise.

Olivier Joris is a Member of the EESC Employers' Group

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