



Brussels, 17 May 2019

LITTLE PROGRESS ACHIEVED ON BUDGETARY INSTRUMENT DURING EUROGROUP/ECOFIN

EU Finance Ministers gathered to continue discussions on the EU's economic reform agenda. The Eurogroup and ECOFIN meetings focused on the so-called budgetary instrument for convergence and competitiveness (BICC), digital taxation, the Commission's assessment for the 2019/20 economic outlook and the European Semester. Overall, very little progress was achieved, with Ministers deciding to postpone talks on most topics until the next round of meetings, on 13-14 June. In particular, technical work on the BICC is now expected to continue at working group level, particularly on the nature of the financing sources.

SPITZENKANDIDATEN DISAGREE OVER CLIMATE CHANGE AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE

With just over a week before election day, the six *Spitzenkandidaten* – Manfred Weber (EPP, DE), Frans Timmermans (S&D, NL), Jan Zahradil (ECR, CZ), Margrethe Vestager (ALDE, DK), Ska Keler (Greens, DE) and Nico Cué (GUE, BE) – participated in the last pan-European debate of the election campaign. The debate, which was held in the hemicycle of the European Parliament in Brussels, was broadcasted across the EU and was divided into six sections: migration, youth and unemployment, taxation and competition, the rise of populism, climate change and international trade, with the latter two spurring the most disagreements.

NEW RULES ON INTEROPERABILITY, NOISE AND ACCESS TO RAILWAYS ADOPTED

The Commission adopted rules regarding rail interoperability, train accessibility for persons with reduced mobility, and rail noise. These measures complete preparations for the Fourth Railway Package's technical pillar, aiding the completion of the Single European Railway Area. The aim remains to revitalise the European rail sector and enhance its competitiveness versus other transport modes. The adopted rules aim to improve disabled access, counter rail noise and increase interoperable train operations, notably the European rail traffic management system (ERTMS). They will also cut costs and bureaucracy, allowing the European Railways Agency (ERA) to issue EU vehicle authorisations and operating certification.

ANNUAL EU-JAPAN BUSINESS ROUND TABLE DISCUSSES ECONOMIC AGREEMENT WITH JAPAN

The EU-Japan Business Round Table – an annual business summit to enhance trade, industrial and investment cooperation between the EU and Japan – was held in Brussels. The central issue was the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), alongside digital and circular economy, climate change and the agri-food industry. The EPA, which entered into force on 1 February, has already reaped rewards for both sides, but the Round Table highlighted specialised guidance is needed. The so-called EU-Japan Centre for Industrial Cooperation – co-funded by the Commission and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan – aims to deliver this.

TELECOM RULES: COST CAP TO INTRA-EU CALLS WHILST 5G DEPLOYMENT CONTINUES

In the framework of the new European Electronic Communications Code, a new maximum price will now apply for all international calls and SMS within the EU. Calling from one Member State to another will now cost a maximum amount of 19 cents per minute, whilst SMS will cost up to 6 cents per

message. In the same context, the European Commission adopted an Implementing Decision to harmonise the last pioneer frequency band needed for 5G deployment across the EU. Member States can now set common technical conditions and subsequently allow the use of the 26 GHz band for 5G systems by end-2020.

COMING UP NEXT WEEK

- **20 May: European Economic Area Council.** On the agenda: functioning of EEA agreement.
- **20-21 May: Informal meeting of environment ministers.**
- **21 May: General Affairs Council.** On the agenda: MFF 2021-2027 (external action), rule of law.
- **21 May: European Union Military Committee (EUMC).**
- **22-23 May: Education, Youth, Culture and Sports Council.** On the agenda: the future of work, approach to teaching and learning languages, DiscoverEU.
- **23-26 May: European Elections.**

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