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Commission lifts "yellow card" from Thailand for its actions against illegal fishing

The European Commission delists Thailand from the group of "warned countries" as recognition of its progress in tackling illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Today the Commission acknowledges that Thailand has successfully addressed the shortcomings in its fisheries legal and administrative systems. European Commissioner for environment, maritime affairs and fisheries Karmenu **Vella** said: *"Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing damages global fish stocks but it also hurts the people living from the sea, especially those already vulnerable to poverty. Fighting illegal fishing is therefore a priority for the EU. I am excited that today we have a new committed partner in this fight."* The global value of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing is estimated at 10-20 billion euros per year. The so-called "yellow card" for Thailand has been in place since April 2015 - a warning from the EU that the country at the time was not sufficiently tackling illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Thailand plays a central role in the international supply chain for fisheries products. Since the yellow card was issued, the Commission and Thailand have engaged in a constructive process of cooperation and dialogue. This has resulted in a major upgrade of the Thai fisheries governance in accordance with the international commitments of the country. Thailand has amended its fisheries legal framework in line with international law of the sea instruments. It has reinforced compliance with its obligations as a flag, port, coastal and market State, strengthened the mechanisms of control of the national fishing fleet and enhanced its monitoring, control and surveillance systems. Today's decision reverses the first step of a process that could have led to a complete import ban of marine fisheries products into the EU. More information is available in the press release and MEMO. *(For more information: Enrico Brivio – Tel.: + 32 229 56172; Daniela Stoycheva - Tel.: +32 229 53664)*

BELLA project: A new digital data highway will bring Europe and Latin America closer

The contract to construct a fibre optic cable running under the Atlantic Ocean that will connect Latin America and Europe is now in force. This new transatlantic cable is scheduled to be ready for use in 2020 and will run between Portugal and Brazil. It will provide high broadband connectivity, advancing business, scientific and cultural exchanges between the two continents. A key participant in the project is the BELLA (Building the Europe Link to Latin America) Consortium, an international partnership of research and education networks whose leading investor is the European Commission with a contribution of approximately EUR 26.5 million from Horizon 2020, Copernicus, and the regional Development Cooperation Instrument. Neven **Mimica**, Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Elżbieta **Bieńkowska**, Commissioner for the Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, Carlos **Moedas**, Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation and Mariya **Gabriel**, Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, said in a joint statement: *"Latin America and Europe have never been so closely connected: we are pleased to see this intercontinental cable becoming a reality. The new digital highway will support innovation for improved earth observation services, be a step forward in the creation of an EU–L atin America common research area, and tackle Latin America's digital divide with Europe and within the region, with potential for even more collaboration in the years to come. This project also reflects the EU's commitment to work together with Latin America towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda."* In addition to facilitating collaboration in areas such as cloud computing, telemedicine, business and research and education communities this new undersea connection will bolster the uptake of earth observation data and enable new scientific discoveries. Furthermore, it will support further interconnectivity among Latin American countries. For more information see here. *(For more information: Nathalie Vandystadt - Tel.: +32 229 67083; Marietta Grammenou - Tel.: +32 229 83583)*

State aid: Commission approves support for production of electricity from renewable energy sources and for electro-intensive users in Lithuania

The European Commission has approved, under EU State aid rules, a measure to support the production of electricity from renewable energy sources and a measure to support electro-intensive users in Lithuania. In 2012, Lithuania set up a scheme to support producers of electricity from renewable energy sources. Today, the Commission approved aid granted under this scheme from 2012 to 2015, when the last beneficiary under the scheme was selected. During this period, beneficiaries were selected through tender procedures and are then granted support in the form of a feed-in-premium for a period of 12 years. Small scale electricity plants receive support in the form of a fixed feed-in-tariff (i.e. a guaranteed price for the electricity produced) for a period of 12 years. The Commission assessed the scheme under EU State aid rules, in particular under the 2008 Guidelines on State aid for environmental protection and 2014 Guidelines on State aid for environmental protection and energy and concluded that the Lithuanian measure is in line with EU State aid rules, as it promotes the generation of electricity from renewable sources, in line with the environmental objectives of the EU, without unduly distorting competition. The Lithuanian support scheme for producers of electricity from renewable energy sources is financed via a levy paid by the final electricity consumers. From 1 January 2019, Lithuania intends to grant reductions on this levy to energy-intensive industrial users. The Commission concluded that the Lithuanian measure is in line with EU State aid rules, in particular with the Guidelines on State aid for environmental protection and energy 2014-2020 . The measure will promote EU energy and climate goals and ensure the global competitiveness of energy-intensive users and industries, without unduly distorting competition in the Single Market. Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said: *"These two schemes will allow Lithuania to both continue supporting the development of renewable energy sources in the country and to preserve the competitiveness of electricity-intensive companies by reducing their contributions to the financing of this support. This will contribute to Lithuania's transition to low carbon and environmentally sustainable energy supply, in line with the EU environmental objectives and our state aid rules."* The full press release is available online. *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Giulia Astuti - Tel.: +32 229 55344)*

State aid: Commission adopts two decisions recommending taxation of ports in Italy and Spain

The European Commission has proposed, in two separate decisions, that Italy and Spain align their taxation of ports with State aid rules. Cross-border competition plays an important role in the ports sector and the Commission is committed to ensuring a level playing field in this key economic sector. Ports carry out both non-economic (e.g. maritime traffic control) which typically fall within the competence of public authorities and are outside the scope of EU State aid control and economic activities, to which EU State aid rules apply. The commercial operation of port infrastructure, such as providing paid access to the port constitutes an economic activity. A corporate tax exemption for ports that earn profits from economic activities can provide them with a competitive advantage when they operate on the internal market and therefore involves State aid, which may not be compatible with EU rules. In Italy, ports are fully exempt from corporate income tax. In Spain, ports are exempt from corporate income tax on their main sources of revenue, such as port fees or income from rental or concession contracts. In the Basque Country, ports are fully exempt from corporate tax. In April 2018, the Commission informed Italy and Spain of its concerns regarding their regimes for the taxation of ports. The Commission takes the preliminary view that, in both Italy and Spain, the existing tax regimes provide the ports with a selective advantage that may breach EU State aid rules. Today, the Commission has therefore invited Italy and Spain to adapt their legislation in order to ensure that ports, as from 1 January 2020, will pay corporate tax in the same way as other companies in Italy and Spain, respectively. Each country now has two months to react. Commissioner Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said: "*Ports are key infrastructure for economic growth and regional development. That is why EU State aid rules provide ample room for Member States to support and invest in ports. At the same time, to ensure fair competition across the EU, ports generating profits from economic activities should pay taxes in the same way as other companies - no more, no less.*" The full press release is available online. *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Giulia Astuti - Tel.: +32 229 55344)*

State aid: Commission approves a €320 million scheme to support biomass energy installations close to forests at risk of fires in Portugal

The European Commission has approved, under EU State aid rules, a Portuguese scheme to support biomass energy installations located close to forest areas regarded as "critical", due to the risk of fires. The new installations will produce both electricity and combined heat and power (cogeneration). The measure aims to incentivise forest owners to clean the forests at risk by using the forest residues to produce biomass energy. This will help preventing future forest fires in Portugal. The aid will be provided in the form of a feed-in premium (a top-up payment over the market price) to the selected installations for every unit of electricity produced, as well as an environmental tariff premium (called PDIF) linked to the use of biomass from Portuguese forests in the "critical areas". The scheme will run for 15 years and have a budget of around €320 million and will be funded via an increase in energy tariffs. The Commission concluded that the measure meets the requirements of the 2014 Guidelines on State Aid for Environmental Protection and Energy, as it will help Portugal increase the share of electricity produced from renewable sources to meet its climate targets, in line with the environmental objectives of the EU, without unduly distorting competition. The Commission also found that measure is in line with the 2014-2020 Agricultural Guidelines, applicable to the environmental component of the premium (the PDIF). More information will be available on the Commission competition website in the public case register under the case number SA.48881, once any confidentiality issues have been resolved. *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Giulia Astuti - Tel.: +32 229 55344)*

State aid: Commission to prolong EU State aid rules and launch evaluation

The European Commission plans to prolong for two years seven sets of State aid rules, otherwise expiring in 2020. The Commission has also launched an evaluation of those rules and of other State aid rules to assess whether to further prolong them or possibly update them in the future. Since May 2012, the Commission has implemented a major reform of EU State aid rules, the State Aid Modernisation. This allows Member States to quickly implement State aid that fosters investment, economic growth and job creation, leaving the Commission to focus its State aid control on the cases most liable to distort competition. To provide predictability and legal certainty, whilst preparing for a possible future update of the State aid rules adopted as part of the State Aid Modernisation, the Commission will take two steps. First, the Commission intends to prolong for two years (until end 2022) the validity of the rules otherwise expiring by end 2020. Second, line with the Commission's Better Regulation Guidelines, the Commission will evaluate those rules together with the other State aid rules. The evaluation takes the form of a "fitness check" and will provide a basis for decisions, to be taken by the Commission in the future, about whether to further prolong or possibly update the rules. The full press release is available online in EN, FR, DE. *(For more information: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Giulia Astuti - Tel.: +32 229 55344)*

Concentrations: la Commission autorise l'acquisition du contrôle en commun du Groupe Nemera par Astorg et Montagu

La Commission Européenne a approuvé, en vertu du règlement européen sur les concentrations, l'acquisition du contrôle en commun du Groupe Nemera, basé en France, par les sociétés Astorg Asset Management ("Astorg"), basée au Luxembourg, et Montagu Private Equity ("Montagu"), basée en France. Avant la transaction, le Groupe Nemera était contrôlé exclusivement par Montagu. Après la transaction, le Groupe Nemera sera contrôlé conjointement par Astorg et Montagu. Le Groupe Nemera est actif dans la fabrication et la vente de systèmes d'administration de médicaments destinés au secteur pharmaceutique, ainsi qu'au secteur des biotechnologies. Astorg et Montagu sont des sociétés de capital-investissement. La Commission a conclu que la concentration envisagée ne soulèverait pas de problème de concurrence, compte tenu de l'absence de chevauchement entre les activités des entreprises concernées. L'opération a été examinée dans le cadre de la procédure simplifiée de contrôle des concentrations. De plus amples informations sont disponibles sur le site internet concurrence de la Commission, dans le registre public des affaires sous le numéro d'affaire M.9173. *(Pour plus d'informations: Ricardo Cardoso – Tel.: +32 229 80100; Maria Tsoni - Tel.: +32 229 90526)*

Upcoming events of the European Commission (ex-Top News)

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