Top News

Building a European Health Union: Stronger crisis preparedness and response for Europe
The European Commission this week put forward a set of proposals to strengthen the EU’s health security framework, and to reinforce the crisis preparedness and response role of key EU agencies. The proposals focus on revamping the existing legal framework for serious cross border threats to health, as well as reinforcing the crisis preparedness and response role of key EU agencies, namely the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and the European Medicines Agency. President von der Leyen said: “Our aim is to protect the health of all European citizens. The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the need for more coordination in the EU, more resilient health systems, and better preparation for future crises.”

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Coronavirus: Commission approves contract with BioNTech-Pfizer alliance to ensure access to a potential vaccine
The European Commission this week approved a fourth contract with pharmaceutical companies BioNTech and Pfizer, which provides for the initial purchase of 200 million doses on behalf of all EU Member States, plus an option to request up to a further 100 million doses, to be supplied once the vaccine has proven to be safe and effective against COVID-19. EU Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides said the agreement followed the encouraging first indications from the clinical trial results.

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Union of Equality: The Commission presents its first-ever strategy on LGBTIQ equality in the EU
The European Commission this week presented the first-ever EU Strategy for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, non-binary, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) equality. The Strategy addresses the inequalities and challenges affecting LGBTIQ people, setting out a number of targeted actions, including legal and funding measures, for the next 5 years. It proposes to extend the list of EU crimes to cover hate crime, including homophobic hate speech and hate crime and to bring forward the legislation on the mutual recognition of parenthood in cross border situations, among others. It also ensures that LGBTIQ concerns are well reflected in EU policy-making.

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EU budget: European Commission welcomes agreement on €1.8 trillion package
The European Commission this week welcomed the agreement between the European Parliament and EU Member States in the Council on Europe’s next long-term budget (MFF) and NextGenerationEU, the temporary recovery instrument. Once adopted, the package of a total of €1.8 trillion will be the largest package ever financed through the EU budget. It will help rebuild a post-COVID-19 Europe, which will be greener, more digital, more resilient and better fit for the current and forthcoming challenges. The MFF (Multi-annual Financial Framework) Regulation and the Interinstitutional Agreement must now be formally adopted by the European Parliament and the Council.

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Other news

Statement of European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on the result of the US presidential election

In a statement issued last Saturday, President von der Leyen congratulated Joe Biden on his victory in the US presidential election. She said: "The European Commission stands ready to intensify cooperation with the new Administration and the new Congress to address pressing challenges we face and notably: fighting the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic and social consequences, tackling climate change together, promoting a digital transformation that benefits people, strengthening our common security, as well as reforming the rules-based multilateral system."

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European Commission publishes annual Education and Training Monitor

The European Commission this week published its annual Education and Training Monitor analysing how education and training is evolving in the EU and its Member States. The 2020 Monitor has a special focus on teaching and learning in the digital age. With regard to digital skills, although Ireland performs better than the EU average in advanced digital skills, the average skills of the wider adult population remain below the EU average. On a more positive note, the Monitor also shows that Ireland has amongst the lowest shares of (15 year olds) underachievers in the areas of reading, maths and science. Ireland also performs very well in countering the impact of the socio-economic background on the educational success of pupils.

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EU increases its contribution to COVAX to €500 million to secure COVID-19 vaccines for low and middle-income countries

The European Union is contributing an additional €100 million in grant funding to support the COVAX Facility to secure access to future COVID-19 vaccines in low and middle-income countries. The funds will complement the €400 million in guarantees the EU already committed for COVAX, making the Union one of the leading donors. EU Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides said: "With this additional contribution we are one step closer to the objective of funding the purchase of 2 billion vaccines for the most vulnerable populations in 92 low and middle-income countries."

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EU Commission adopts new forest reference levels
The European Commission has adopted new ‘forest reference levels’ that will apply in each EU country between 2021 and 2025. The levels describe the climate impact of each country’s forestry, if forest management practices and wood use are kept similar to those in the 2000-2009 reference period. If countries make changes to their forest management or wood use that reduce emissions or increase carbon stored in wood products compared to the forest reference level, they can offset debits of other land uses and use some of the resulting credits to compensate emissions from the agriculture, transport or buildings sectors.

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**EU trade agreements: delivering for Europe's businesses**

The 4th Annual Report on the Implementation of the European Union’s Trade Agreements in 2019 shows that EU trade agreements continued to facilitate fair and sustainable trade and solidify the framework of international rules. Trade with the 65 preferential partners covered in the report grew by 3.4% in 2019, while the EU’s total external trade grew by 2.5% overall. The EU’s trade agreements with Canada and Japan have especially boosted trade, by nearly 25% and 6%, respectively, since their entry into force.

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**Antitrust: Commission sends Statement of Objections to Amazon for the use of non-public independent seller data**

The European Commission has informed Amazon of its preliminary view that it has breached EU antitrust rules by distorting competition in online retail markets. The Commission takes issue with Amazon systematically relying on non-public business data of independent sellers who sell on its marketplace, to the benefit of Amazon’s own retail business, which directly competes with those third party sellers. The Commission also opened a second formal antitrust investigation into the possible preferential treatment of Amazon’s own retail offers and those of marketplace sellers that use Amazon’s logistics and delivery services.

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**Boeing WTO case: The EU puts in place countermeasures against U.S. exports**

The European Commission’s regulation increasing tariffs on U.S. exports into the EU worth $4 billion entered into effect earlier this week. The countermeasures have been agreed by EU Member States since the U.S. has not yet provided the basis for a negotiated settlement, which would include an immediate removal of U.S. tariffs on EU exports in the Airbus WTO case. The World Trade Organization (WTO) formally authorised the EU on 26 October to take such countermeasures against illegal U.S. subsidies to aircraft maker Boeing.

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**European Court of Auditors signs off EU accounts for 13th year in a row**

The European Court of Auditors (ECA) has decided to give the EU annual accounts a clean bill of health for the 13th year in a row, finding them true and fair. In line with previous years, the Court has also acknowledged the revenue part of the EU Budget was well managed.

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**Green and Digital: study shows technical and policy options to limit surge in energy consumption for cloud and data centres**
The results of a new EU study on cloud services and data centres show that the energy consumption of data centres in EU Member States is expected to increase from 2.7% of electricity demand in 2018 to 3.2% by 2030. The study provides technical and policy options to limit this increase: more efficient cooling systems, heat reuse, the use of renewable energy to supply data centres, the construction of these data centres in regions with a cold climate and the use of green public procurement rules by Europe’s public authorities.


The European Commission has adopted an explanatory note on how the new European Single Electronic Format (ESEF) will work for listed companies in the European Union. From 2021 onwards, all listed companies in the EU will be able to use the ESEF – a new, single electronic document – when publishing their annual financial reports.

Ireland sees one of the largest drops in employment in the second quarter of 2020

New Eurostat figures show Ireland saw one of the largest falls in employment in the EU in the second quarter of 2020 compared to the fourth quarter of 2019 due to the impact of the Covid19 pandemic. The employment rate for people aged 20-64 years was down 2.2%, from 75% to 72.8%, the 5th largest fall in the EU after Estonia, Spain, Bulgaria and Portugal. The EU average fall was 1.1%. Young people were the most affected with the employment rate of Irish 15-24 year olds down by 6.5% in the second quarter, the second largest drop in the EU after Slovenia (-8.1%).

Agenda

Friday 13 November: Justice and Home Affairs Council

EU home affairs ministers will discuss different aspects of the pact on migration and asylum, proposed by the European Commission on 23 September. The Commission’s proposals cover various aspects of migration and asylum policies, including: the internal dimension, the external dimension and border management.

Monday 16 to Friday 20 November: European Citizens’ Initiative Week

In January 2020, the new rules on the European citizens’ initiative started to apply, making it easier for EU citizens to call upon the European Commission to propose legislation in areas that matter to them and where the Union has the power to act. To mark the beginning of this new phase in the life of the European Citizens’ Initiative and give it a new impetus, the European Commission organising a full week of online activities built around the European Citizens’ Initiative. The event will be live web streamed. A full programme is available on the link below.

Monday 16 November: Brussels Connection event organised by the European Movement Ireland
European Movement Ireland is organising its next online Brussels Connection event on Monday afternoon, 16 November. Speakers include: Thomas Byrne TD, Minister of State for European Affairs; Ambassador Tom Hanney, Permanent Representative of Ireland to the European Union; Noelle O Connell, CEO EM Ireland; and David Garraby, EM Ireland Brussels Branch Chair. Further information/registration at the link below. Brussels Connection is a great opportunity for members and friends of the European in Ireland and Brussels to come together and hear insights from Ireland in Europe.

Monday 16 November: Video conference of Agriculture and Fisheries ministers
EU agriculture and fisheries ministers will hold an exchange of views on the current situation of the EU’s agricultural market. Ministers will hear information on a number of matters: food losses and food waste: assessment of progress made in implementing the Council conclusions adopted on 28 June 2016 - information from the presidency and the Commission; conference on the ‘farm to fork’ strategy - information from the Commission; preparation of the United Nations food systems summit - information from the presidency; and, perspectives for the EU forest-related policies and EU forest strategy post-2020 - information from the presidency.

Tuesday 17 November: Video conference of European Affairs Ministers
The Council will hold a debate on the annual rule of law dialogue and will assess the situation in specific member states. Ministers will exchange views on the state of play of the enlargement process in relation to the Republic of Albania and the Republic of North Macedonia. The Council will also discuss the state of play of negotiations on the multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027.

Tuesday 17 November: Free European Commission SMEDIAs workshop
The European Commission Representation in Ireland, supported by European Movement Ireland, is organising a free online media workshop on Tuesday morning 17 November 2020 for third-level students from any background who are applying for the 2021 Student Media Awards (SMEDIAs) in the European Commission category. This year’s guest speakers are: Christine Bohan, Deputy Editor, TheJournal.ie and Elisha Carey, 2020 European Commission SMEDIAs Prizewinner. Further information/registration on the link below.

Wednesday 18 November: Irish organic dairy farming and the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030: a real alternative for conventional dairy farmers?
Sligo Europe Direct Information Centre is organising a free online meeting on the theme: "Irish organic dairy farming and the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030: a real alternative for conventional dairy farmers?". Panellists Daria Hawat (Policy Officer for organics in the Directorate for Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Commission), John Liston (organic dairy farmer and director of the Little Milk Company), Gillain Westbrook (CEO Irish Organic Association) and Nigel Renaghan, Chairman of IFA Organics Project Team will discuss what Ireland needs to do to make organic dairy farming a real alternative for conventional dairy farmers. Questions from attendees can be taken via Zoom chat. The event takes place from 2.30 to 3.30 pm on Wednesday 18 November.

Wednesday 18 November: Video conference of the members of the European Economic Area Council
Thursday 19 and Friday 20 November: 12th Citizen's Energy Forum
The Citizens' Energy Forum was established in 2008, and meets annually to explore consumers' perspective and role in the EU energy market towards achieving the clean energy transition. It directly feeds into the work of the European Commission in the energy and consumer policy areas. Like last year, the event is being organised by the European Commission in collaboration with Ireland's Commission for Regulation of Utilities (CRU). It is the first Citizens’ Energy Forum taking place after the adoption of the European Green Deal. Speakers will include: Kadri Simson, EU Commissioner for Energy, Eamon Ryan, Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications, and Didier Reynders, EU Commissioner for Justice.

Thursday 19 November: Video conference of Foreign Affairs Ministers
Information on this meeting will be available at the link below.

Tuesday 20 November: Video conference of European Affairs ministers
The Council will hold a debate on the annual rule of law dialogue and will assess the situation in specific member states. Also on the agenda: the enlargement process in relation to the Republic of Albania and the Republic of North Macedonia and the state of play of negotiations on the multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027.

Wednesday 25 November: Launch of Access Europe
The Wheel is launching a new EU funding support service on Wednesday afternoon, 25 November. Access Europe, which is funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs, will provide information, advice, helpdesk support and network building opportunities for civil society organisations around accessing and managing EU funding. This online event will include a discussion between CEO of The Wheel Deirdre Garvey and Minister of State Thomas Byrne TD on civil society opportunities at EU level, and how Access Europe can support engagement.

Friday 27 November: European Researchers' Night
European Researchers' Night takes place this year on Friday 27 November. The event is funded under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions programme and aims to bring researchers closer to the public. It showcases the diversity of science and its impact on citizens’ daily lives, stimulating interest in research careers - particularly among young people. As of now, there are two events listed for Ireland: Cork Discovers and START (Start Talking About Research Today) at Trinity College Dublin. For more information, click on the link below.

Public consultations
Zero Pollution Action Plan
The European Commission has launched an open public consultation on an EU Action Plan “Towards a Zero Pollution Ambition for air, water and soil – building a Healthier Planet for Healthier People”. The consultation follows the recent publication of the roadmap that outlines EU plans to achieve zero pollution by better preventing, remediating, monitoring and reporting on pollution, and helping mainstream the ambition in all policies and investment tools. It will be open for consultation until 10 February 2021.

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**Competition policy and the EU Green Deal**

The European Commission's Directorate General for Competition has published a call for contributions on questions about how competition rules and sustainability policies work together. The purpose of this call for contributions is to gather ideas and proposals from everyone with a stake in this issue, including competition experts, academia, industry, environmental groups and consumer organisations. The contributions will feed into a conference early next year that will bring those different perspectives together.

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**Organic farming - Action plan for the development of EU organic production**

The European Commission has launched a public consultation to gather stakeholders’ views on challenges and opportunities for the development of organic production and consumption in the EU. The consultation is open until 27 November 2020.

Read more...

**EU Forest Strategy roadmap**

The new EU Forest Strategy roadmap is open for public consultation and feedback until 4 December. Feedback will be taken into account for further development and fine tuning of the initiative.

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**Electromagnetic compatibility - evaluation of the EU rules**

The purpose of this public consultation is to assess if the Electromagnetic Compatibility Directive (EMCD) is still fit for purpose in terms of effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, coherence and EU added value. The public consultation is open until 29 January 2021.

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**Job opportunities**

**Traineeships at the European Parliament**

Applications are now open for (Schuman) traineeships at the European Parliament for the period March to July 2021. Applicants for the Schuman traineeships must: be aged 18+; fulfil the language requirement; provide a university level diploma(s); provide an eligible criminal record; not have worked for more than two consecutive months within an EU institution or body; not have carried out a Study Visit in the Secretariat of the European Parliament six months prior to the beginning of the traineeship.

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**Calls for Tender/Proposals**

**Call for expressions of interest - EU Industry Week 2021 Local events**
The European Commission's Directorate General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs is calling for expressions of interest for local virtual events as part of EU Industry Week 2021. Stakeholders from all sectors and ecosystems of industry are invited to submit their proposals to organise a local event. The main thematic focus of your session should be on the implementation of the new industrial strategy in the post-COVID economic and social reality, with a specific focus on the challenges and needs of European industrial ecosystems. The deadline to apply is 15 November 2020.

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