

## Top News

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### **I cannot tell you today if in the end there will be a deal: President von der Leyen on Brexit**

In an address to the European Parliament on Wednesday of this week, President von der Leyen said: "These are decisive days for our negotiations with the United Kingdom. But I cannot tell you today, if in the end there will be a deal. There has been genuine progress on a number of important questions: on law enforcement and judicial cooperation; on social security coordination. And also on goods, services and transport we now have the outline of a possible final text. In these areas there are still some important issues to agree, but they should be manageable. However, there are still three issues that can make the difference between a deal and no deal. The crucial topics for the European side are of course questions linked to the level playing field, governance and fisheries."

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### **Commission proposes new rules on Data Governance**

The European Commission this week proposed new EU rules on Data Governance to facilitate data sharing across sectors and Member States. These new rules will, among other things, empower Europeans to decide what happens to their data, and what data they would like to share with whom; facilitate data altruism to make it easier and safer for companies and individuals to voluntarily make their data available for the benefit of society; and, enhance the reuse of public sector data that cannot be made available as open data. Executive Vice-President Margrethe Vestager said: "You don't have to share all data. But if you do and data is sensitive you should be able to do in a manner where data can be trusted and protected."

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### **Affordable, accessible and safe medicines for all: Commission presents a Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe**

The European Commission this week adopted a new Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe. The Strategy has four main objectives: to ensure access to affordable medicines for patients and address unmet medical needs (e.g. rare diseases); to support the competitiveness, innovation and sustainability of the EU's pharmaceutical industry and the development of high quality, safe, effective and greener medicines; to enhance crisis preparedness and response mechanisms and address security of supply; and, to ensure a strong EU voice in the world by promoting a high level of quality, efficacy and safety standards. The strategy will be implemented via an ambitious agenda of legislative and non-legislative actions which will be launched over the coming years.

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## **Commission approves new contract to secure Moderna vaccine**

The European Commission this week approved a sixth contract under the EU Vaccines Strategy, this time with the pharmaceutical company Moderna. The contract provides for the initial purchase of 80 million doses on behalf of all EU Member States, plus an option to request up to a further 80 million doses, to be supplied once a vaccine has proven to be safe and effective against COVID-19. The Commission has already signed contracts with AstraZeneca, Sanofi-GSK, Janssen Pharmaceutica NV, BioNTech-Pfizer and approved a contract with CureVac.

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## **Other news**

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### **Gender Action Plan – putting women and girls' rights at the heart of the global recovery for a gender-equal world**

The European Commission this week put forward a new Action Plan to promote gender equality and women's empowerment through all external action of the European Union. The Gender Action Plan III is the EU's blueprint for building a gender-equal world. It aims to curb the rise of inequalities in the difficult context created by the COVID-19 health and socio-economic crisis, and to accelerate progress on gender equality and women's empowerment as a key aspect of building back better. EU High Representative and Vice President Josep Borrell said: "Granting the same rights to all empowers our societies. It makes them richer and more secure. It is a fact that goes beyond principles or moral duties."

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### **Commission adopts Action Plan on Intellectual Property**

The European Commission has published a new Action Plan on Intellectual Property (IP) to help companies, and especially SMEs make the most of their inventions and creations. The Plan announces measures in five key areas: improving the protection of IP; boosting the uptake of IP by small and medium-sized companies; facilitating the sharing of IP; fighting counterfeiting and improving enforcement of IP rights; and, promoting a global level playing field.

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### **Marked improvement in Europe's air quality over past decade: European Environment Agency**

Better air quality has led to a significant reduction of premature deaths over the past decade in Europe according to the 2020 Air Quality in Europe report from the European Environment Agency (EEA). However, almost all Europeans still suffer from air pollution, leading to about 400,000 premature deaths across the continent in 2018 (the report covers 41 countries). The report also shows that Ireland was one of only four countries in Europe — along with Estonia, Finland and Iceland — which had fine

particulate matter concentrations that were below the World Health Organization's (WHO) stricter guideline values in 2018.

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### **Good news for consumers: New rules to strengthen collective redress in the EU clear final hurdle**

The European Parliament this week adopted EU-wide rules for the protection of the collective interest of consumers.

The new Representative Actions Directive will make collective redress available across the EU, covering a broad range of areas from financial services to passenger rights, from telecommunications to energy. Vice President Věra Jourová said: "One single EU citizen taking a huge company to court – this used to be a very unfair battle. With the new directive things will improve: Consumers from all over the European Union can team up and seek justice and redress together." The Directive is expected to enter into force in December. Member States will have until January 2023 to transpose it into national law.

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### **Covid19 aid approved for six member states including Ireland**

The European Parliament this week approved almost €133 million in EU Aid in response to the coronavirus crisis in seven EU countries including Ireland. More than €132.7 million will be distributed in advance payments to Germany, Ireland, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Hungary, and Portugal to help tackle the major public health emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Ireland is to receive €23.3 million of this funding.

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### **European Commission welcomes Japan as a member of the International Platform on Sustainable Finance**

The European Commission has welcomed Japan as the latest member of the International Platform on Sustainable Finance (IPSF). The IPSF was created in October 2019 as part of international efforts to meet the commitments of the Paris Agreement. It is a multilateral forum of dialogue between policymakers that are in charge of developing sustainable finance policy. Commissioner for Financial Services, Financial Stability and Capital Markets Union, Mairead McGuinness said: "Japan's decision to join the International Platform on Sustainable Finance is very welcome news. And, I hope that it will inspire other countries to join this important initiative."

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### **Commission opens infringement procedures against Ireland and 22 other Member States for failing to transpose the Directive on audiovisual content**

The European Commission this week launched infringement procedures against 23 Member States, including Ireland, and the United Kingdom for failing to enact the new rules governing EU-wide coordination of all audiovisual media, both traditional TV broadcasts and on-demand services, and video-sharing platforms. The new rules aim to reinforce the protection of viewers, with particular regard to the safety of those most vulnerable such as minors, extend the rules regarding hate speech to video-sharing platforms, and foster cultural diversity in audiovisual media.

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### **Joint Research Centre proposes new framework to raise awareness and resilience against hybrid threats**

The European Commission's Joint Research Centre has proposed a new framework to raise awareness and resilience against hybrid threats. The Framework describes the different components of hybrid threats, shedding light on the actors, as well as their objectives and tools. The research teams call for a whole-of-society approach, which brings together all civil, military and political actors for a more effective response to hybrid threats.

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### **EU reconfirms support for Afghanistan at 2020 Geneva Conference**

The European Union this week reconfirmed its long-standing solidarity and partnership with the people of Afghanistan, pledging support of €1.2 billion over the period 2021–2025 in both long-term and emergency assistance at the 2020 Afghanistan Conference 'Peace, Prosperity and Self-Reliance'. EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell said: "The Afghan people can count on the European Union's support for a prosperous and peaceful future for their country, but our support relies on democracy, human rights, and social progress being protected."

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### **EU contributes €183 million to debt relief for 29 of the world's poorest and most vulnerable countries**

The European Union is to contribute €183 million to the IMF's Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust (CCRT) for debt relief in 29 low-income countries, allowing them to increase their social, health and economic spending in response to the COVID-19 crisis. The CCRT pays debts owed to the IMF for eligible low-income member countries that are hit by the most catastrophic natural disasters or battling public health disasters—such as epidemics or global pandemics.

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### **EU mobilises €86.5 million to fight COVID-19 in Ghana**

The European Union has mobilised €86.5 million in emergency budget support to help Ghana in tackling the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic. This emergency funding will give Ghana the fiscal space to address the coronavirus pandemic and to continue financing basic public services such as healthcare and education, strengthening its resilience.

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### **New ESPAD results: teenage drinking and smoking down, but concerns over risky cannabis use and new addictive behaviours**

Smoking and drinking among 15–16-year-old school students are showing signs of decline, but there are concerns over potentially risky cannabis use and the challenges posed by new addictive behaviours. These are among the findings in a new report from the European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs. It shows that, on average, 1 in 6 school students reported having used an illicit drug at least once in their life. The figure for Ireland is 1 in 5. Cannabis is still the illicit drug most used by school students. On average, 16% of respondents reported using cannabis at least once in their lifetime while 7.1% reported last-month use. In Ireland, 19% of students surveyed had used cannabis at least once while 9% reported last-month use.

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## Agenda

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**Friday 27 November: European Researchers' Night**

European Researchers' Night takes place this 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. There are two events listed for Ireland: Cork Discovers (26-28 November) and START (Start Talking About Research Today) at Trinity College Dublin (18-29 November). For more information about these events, click on the link below.

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### **Friday 27 November: Video conference of Research Ministers**

Ministers will exchange views on the new research and development (R&D) investment targets as proposed by the European Commission in its communication of 30 September 2020: "A new ERA for Research and Innovation".

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### **Monday 30 November: Online event - Investing in a Green Future Ireland's transition to a Green Economy**

The European Movement Ireland in cooperation with the European Parliament Liaison Office in Ireland and the German Embassy in Ireland are hosting an online discussion on the theme "Investing in a Green Future – Ireland's transition to a Green Economy". This event will look at the German Presidency priorities with regard to climate work, and the panel will focus in particular on the investment and job opportunities a Green economy brings to Ireland and Europe. Speakers include: HE Deike Potzel, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Ireland; Richard Bruton TD, Member of Dáil Éireann; Grace O'Sullivan, MEP for Ireland South; Michael Schrodi, Member of the Bundestag; and Prof. John Fitzgerald, Chair of the Irish government's Climate Change Advisory Council. The event will be moderated by Ella Mc Sweeney, journalist.

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### **Monday 30 November: Video conference of Ministers responsible for Youth**

Information on this meeting will be available on the link below.

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### **Monday 30 November: Video conference of Ministers for Education**

Information on this meeting will be available on the link below.

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### **Monday 30 November: Video conference of the Eurogroup**

Information on this meeting will be available on the link below.

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### **Tuesday 1 December: Video conference of Culture Ministers**

Information on this meeting will be available on the link below.

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### **Tuesday 1 December: Video conference of Economic and Finance Ministers**

Information on this meeting will be available on the link below.

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## **Tuesday 1 December: Webinar - Regulating Digital Services and Digital Markets**

On Tuesday lunchtime 1 December, the Institute of International and European Affairs (IIEA) will host a webinar on the theme: "Regulating Digital Services and Digital Markets". The webinar will be addressed by Christiane Canenbley, Deputy Head of European Commission Vice President Margrethe Vestager's Cabinet. In her address, Ms Canenbley will outline why new legislation is needed to respond to the way in which digital technologies have profoundly changed society. She will argue that although online platforms and digital services have brought many benefits for European citizens, they have also created new risks and posed systematic problems. For more information and to register for this free event, click on the link below.

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## **Tuesday 8 December: Online event - Ireland and the Circular Economy**

The European Commission Representation in Ireland, in co-operation with European Movement Ireland, is hosting an online event on the theme: 'Ireland, the EU & the Circular Economy' on Tuesday morning, 8 December. This online event will discuss key elements of the circular economy in Ireland, with a particular focus on how Ireland can transition towards a more circular economy and how the EU can help. Speakers at the event will include: Les Carberry, Head of the Circular Economy Division, Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, William Neale, Adviser on Circular Economy and Green Growth at the European Commission's Environment Directorate General, Professor Kevin O'Connor, BiOrbic, Bioeconomy SFI Research Centre, Emma Walsh - International Partnerships Director of FoodCloud. The event will be moderated by Noelle O'Connell, CEO of European Movement Ireland.

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## **Thursday 10 December: Online event - the EU in Education & Exchange**

The European Commission Representation in Ireland, in collaboration with The Wheel and the European Parliament Liaison Office in Ireland is hosting a special online event on the EU in Education & Exchange. This unique event will bring together key representatives of European programmes supporting students, young people, and those in adult or vocational education and training to discuss opportunities and supports available through EU programmes for education and exchange.

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## **Thursday 10 December: Third European Education Summit - Digital Education Transformation**

The Third European Education Summit provides the opportunity to stakeholders, including national education ministers, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and representatives of the education and training ecosystem, to gather online to: discuss the digital transformation of Europe's education systems in the context of the COVID-19 recovery; exchange experiences and best practices in mitigating the effects of COVID-19 on education and training provision; and, provide feedback on the Commission's vision to create a European Education Area by 2025 and to implement the Digital Education Action Plan.

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## **Thursday 10 and Friday 11 December: European Council**

EU leaders will discuss further coordination on COVID-19, climate change, trade, security and external relations. On 11 December the leaders will also meet for the Euro Summit.

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## Public consultations

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### **Criteria defining environmentally sustainable activities**

The European Commission has launched a public consultation on the first two sets of criteria for determining which economic activities can qualify as environmentally sustainable, under the EU's taxonomy rules. The EU Taxonomy Regulation, which entered into force on 12 July 2020, will help create the world's first-ever "green list" – a classification system for sustainable economic activities. The public consultation will run for four weeks.

Commissioner Mairead McGuinness said: "The EU's Taxonomy Regulation is a key piece of legislation that is central to the European Green Deal. It will be instrumental in channelling investment to green and sustainable projects. By contributing to this public consultation, you can have your say on the development of these rules."

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### **EU Action Plan on zero pollution**

The purpose of this consultation is to gather views from citizens and stakeholders on an EU Action Plan "Towards a Zero Pollution Ambition for air, water and soil" which the European Commission will adopt in 2021. The consultation is open until 10 February 2021.

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### **Rights of the child**

The European Commission is currently preparing a new strategy on the rights of the child. The strategy will provide the policy framework for EU action on children's rights. The aims of this consultation are: to give all citizens and organisations the opportunity to inform policy development; to gather opinions on policy options and their possible impacts; and, to identify opportunities and challenges in relation to the EU actions on children's rights. The consultation is open until 8 December 2020.

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## Calls for Tender/Proposals

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### **Call for proposals to support investigative journalism and media freedom**

The European Commission has launched a call for proposals of €3.9 million to further support cross-border investigations as well as to map and address violations of press and media freedom. The call aims for example at legally and materially supporting investigative journalists training, promoting content sharing, co-creation and translation of journalistic pieces of general interest and monitoring press and media freedom violations to ensure the general public and European institutions are provided with reliable and comprehensive information. It is aimed at NGOs, international organisations, and academia, with each project expected to involve partners from at least two countries, with project coordinators based in the EU. The deadline for submissions is 20 January 2021.

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