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The Commission and Austria secure COVID-19 vaccines for the Western Balkans

The Commission and Austria are announcing today the conclusion of agreements for the delivery of COVID-19 vaccines for the Western Balkans. The 651,000 doses are funded through the €70 million package adopted by the Commission in December 2020 and will be shared with the facilitation of Austria. The first delivery to all the partners in the region is due in May, with regular tranches to continue until August. The President of the European Commission, Ursula **von der Leyen**, said: *“It is crucial to speed up the vaccination campaigns everywhere. I am happy to announce that we have secured doses to help vaccinate health care workers and other vulnerable groups in the Western Balkans. The European Union stands by our partners in the region, who have been looking to us for support. I want to thank Austria for facilitating this transfer, showing its firm commitment and solidarity with the Western Balkans.”*

Enlargement and Neighbourhood Commissioner, **Olivér Várhelyi**, added: *“Despite the current global shortage, the EU will deliver life-saving vaccines for the Western Balkans. We have provided support from the start of the COVID-19 pandemic: First, with emergency medical equipment like masks, ventilators, intensive care units and ambulance vehicles; second, by strengthening the resilience. Now, we will help ensure the vaccination of all frontline medical workers across the region, as well as some of the other vulnerable groups. We care about the Western Balkans*

whose future is in the European Union.” For more information see a [press release](#) and a [press point](#) held by Commissioner **Várhelyi** earlier today. (For more information: Ana Pisonero — Tel.: +32 229 54320; Zoï Muletier — Tel.: +32 229 94306)

Conférence sur l'avenir de l'Europe: lancement de la plateforme numérique multilingue

Le conseil exécutif de la conférence sur l'avenir de l'Europe, a lancé hier la plateforme numérique multilingue pour la conférence sur l'avenir de l'Europe, invitant tous les citoyens de l'UE à contribuer à donner forme à leur propre avenir et à celui de l'Europe. La plateforme, qui est disponible en 24 langues, permettra un partage et un échange d'idées et de points de vue entre les citoyens de toute l'Union lors d'évènements organisés en ligne. La présidente de la Commission européenne, Ursula **von der Leyen**, s'est exprimée en ces termes: « *Santé, changement climatique, emplois de qualité et durables dans une économie de plus en plus numérique, état de nos sociétés démocratiques: nous invitons les Européens à prendre la parole, à exprimer leurs préoccupations et à nous dire dans quelle Europe ils veulent vivre. Grâce à cette plateforme citoyenne, nous donnons à tous la possibilité de contribuer à donner forme à l'avenir de l'Europe et de dialoguer avec des citoyens de l'Europe entière. C'est une excellente occasion de rapprocher virtuellement les Européens. Participez au débat! Ensemble, nous pouvons construire l'avenir auquel nous aspirons pour notre Union.* » La conférence sur l'avenir de l'Europe, qui constitue un débat sans précédent, correspond à une forme ouverte et inclusive de démocratie délibérative. Son objectif est de mieux donner aux citoyens de tous horizons, dans toute l'Europe, la possibilité d'exprimer ce qu'ils attendent de l'Union européenne, afin que ces attentes influent sur la direction future de l'UE et l'élaboration de ses politiques. La présidence conjointe s'est engagée à donner suite aux conclusions de la conférence. Des personnes de tous les horizons, aussi nombreuses que possible, sont encouragées à contribuer, par l'intermédiaire de la plateforme, à donner forme à leur avenir, mais aussi à promouvoir cette plateforme sur les réseaux sociaux, avec le hashtag #TheFuturesYours. Un [communiqué de presse](#) est disponible, ainsi qu'un document [questions-réponses](#) et des fiches d'information sur

document [questions réponses](#) et des notes d'information sur la [plateforme numérique](#) et sur le [déroulement de la](#)

[conférence](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Daniel Ferrie - Tél: +32 229 86500; ; Sinéad Meehan-van Druten – Tél.: +32 229 84094)

Vega: launch of the first world-class supercomputer in the EU

Today, the European Commission together with the [European High-Performance Computing Joint Undertaking](#) and the Government of Slovenia will inaugurate the operation of the Vega Supercomputer at a high-level ceremony in Maribor, Slovenia. This marks the launch of a first EU supercomputer procured jointly with EU and Member State funds, with a joint investment of €17.2 million. Executive Vice-President for a Europe Fit for the Digital Age, Margrethe **Vestager**, said: *“We are celebrating today the launch of the Vega supercomputer – the first of several. Supercomputing will open new doors for European SMEs to compete in tomorrow's high tech economy. Even more importantly, by supporting artificial intelligence to identify the molecules for breakthrough drug treatments, by tracking infections for COVID and other diseases, European supercomputing can help save lives.”* Executive Vice-President **Vestager** will participate in the launch ceremony today together with the Prime Minister of Slovenia, Janez Janša. The new Vega supercomputer is capable of 6.9 Petaflops of computer power and will support the development of applications in many domains, such as machine learning, artificial intelligence, and high-performance data analytics. It will help European researchers and industry to make significant advances in bio-engineering, weather forecasting, the fight against climate change, personalised medicine, as well as in the discovery of new materials and drugs that will benefit EU citizens. The EuroHPC Joint Undertaking pools European and national resources to procure and deploy world-class supercomputers and technologies. In addition to [Vega in Slovenia](#), EuroHPC supercomputers have been acquired and are being installed in the following centres: [Sofia Tech](#) Park in Bulgaria, [IT4Innovations National Supercomputing Center](#) in Czechia, [CINECA](#) in Italy, [LuxProvide](#) in Luxembourg, [Minho Advanced](#)

[STNESA](#) in Italy, [E.ON Energy](#) in Luxembourg, [Mimoz/Avanoco Computing Center](#) in Portugal, and [CSC](#) – IT Center for

Science in Finland. Moreover, a [Commission proposal](#) for a new Regulation for the EuroHPC Joint Undertaking, presented in September 2020, aims to enable a further investment of €8 billion in the next generation of supercomputers, including emerging technologies such as quantum computers. More information will be available in this [press release by the EuroHPC Joint Undertaking](#). (For more information: Johannes Bahrke – Tel.: +32 229 58615; Marietta Grammenou – Tel.: +32 229 83583).

Sécurité routière : 4 000 tués en moins sur les routes de l'UE en 2020, le taux de mortalité tombant à un niveau historiquement bas

La Commission européenne a publié aujourd'hui les chiffres préliminaires sur la mortalité routière en 2020. Selon les estimations, 18 800 personnes ont été tuées lors d'un accident de la route l'année dernière, soit une baisse annuelle sans précédent de 17 % par rapport à 2019. Cela signifie que près de 4 000 vies ont été épargnées sur les routes de l'UE en 2020 par rapport à 2019. La diminution des volumes de trafic, en raison de la pandémie de COVID-19, a eu une incidence évidente, bien que non mesurable, sur le nombre de tués sur les routes. La commissaire aux transports, Adina **Vălean**, a déclaré à ce propos: « Avec près de 4 000 décès en moins sur les routes de l'UE en 2020 par rapport à 2019, nos routes restent les plus sûres au monde. Néanmoins, nous sommes en deçà de notre objectif pour la dernière décennie et une action commune est nécessaire pour empêcher un retour aux niveaux antérieurs à la COVID. Dans notre [stratégie pour une mobilité durable et intelligente](#), nous avons réaffirmé notre volonté de mettre en œuvre la stratégie de l'UE en matière de sécurité routière et de ramener à un niveau proche de zéro le nombre de décès pour tous les modes de transport. » Au cours de la décennie précédente (2010 à 2020), le nombre de tués a chuté de 36 %, soit en deçà de l'objectif de réduction de 50 % fixé pour cette décennie. Toutefois, avec 42 décès pour un million d'habitants, l'UE demeure le continent où les routes sont les plus sûres au monde. À titre de comparaison, la moyenne mondiale est supérieure à 180. | In communiqué de presse

mentaire est supérieure à 100. Un communiqué de presse est disponible [en ligne](#). (Pour plus d'informations : Stefan de

Keersmaecker – Tél.: +32 229 84680; Stephan Meder – Tél.: +32 229 13917)

Coronavirus response: Commission decides to extend customs and VAT waiver for imports of medical and protective equipment needed to fight the pandemic

The Commission decided yesterday to extend the temporary [waiver](#) of customs duties and Value Added Tax (VAT) on imports from non-EU countries of medical devices and protective equipment used in the fight against COVID-19. Yesterday's decision prolongs the customs duties and VAT relief available under the already existing exemption, which had been due to expire at the end of this month, until 31 December 2021. The prolongation takes into consideration the challenges that Member States still face in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic, and the fact that imports of these goods remain significant. The measure will continue to support Member States financially in getting equipment such as masks or ventilators to the medical staff and patients that need them most. More information on the decision can be found [here](#). The exemption forms part of the Commission's response to COVID-19 in the area of [taxation and customs](#). Yesterday's decision follows a Commission [proposal](#) last week to exempt from VAT goods and services made available by the European Commission, EU bodies and agencies to Member States and citizens during times of crises such as public health emergencies. In December 2020, the Council also agreed on new measures, based on a Commission proposal, allowing for the temporary application of a zero VAT rate to COVID-19 vaccines and either reduced or zero VAT rates to COVID-19 testing kits sold within the EU, if Member States so choose. (For more information: Daniel Ferrie - Tel: +32 229 86500; Nerea Artamendi Erro – Tel: +32 229 90964)

Bilbao, Grenoble, Lilienthal, and Mönchengladbach win European sustainable mobility awards

On 19 April, the European Commission announced Mönchengladbach (Germany) as the winner of the [European](#)

[Mobility Week](#) Award 2020 for larger municipalities, while

Lilienthal (Germany) took home the title for smaller municipalities. The 9th Award for Sustainable Urban Mobility Planning (SUMP) was won by Greater Grenoble Area Mobility Authority (SMMAG) for Grenoble-Alpes SUMP (France), and the EU Urban Road Safety Award went to Bilbao (Spain). The awards all recognise remarkable initiatives carried out in 2020. The annual theme for the European Mobility Week and the SUMP Awards was 'Zero-emission mobility for all'.

Speaking about the finalists, Commissioner for Transport, Adina **Vălean**, said: *"These inspiring achievements really show how cities and towns across Europe can improve people's wellbeing by shifting towards cleaner, greener and more sustainable travel options for all. I invite others to follow this path and to join forces in building a mobility system for future generations that is smart, resilient, and does its share to achieve our ambitious emission reduction goals. I look forward to celebrating with you the 20th Year of European Mobility Week under our call to action 'Move Sustainably. Stay Healthy'."* The European Mobility Week campaign runs from 16-22 September each year. Last year, over 2,900 towns and cities from 53 countries took part. The 2021 campaign theme is 'Safe and Healthy with Sustainable Mobility'. More information is available [here](#). (For more information: Stefan De Keersmaecker – Tel.: +32 229 84680; Stephan Meder – Tel.: +32 229 13917)

State aid: Commission approves restructuring aid for Polish Regional Railways, as Poland commits to an accelerated opening to competition of regional passenger rail transport

The European Commission has concluded that Polish measures to support the restructuring of Polish Regional Railways, the nationwide operator of regional passenger rail transport in Poland, are in line with EU state aid rules. In January 2018, the [Commission opened a formal investigation](#) to assess whether certain aid measures in favor of Polish Regional Railways were in line with EU State aid rules. The Commission assessed the restructuring measures under [Article 107\(3\)\(c\) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union \(TFEU\)](#) which enables Member States to

[European Union \(EU\)](#), which enables member states to grant State aid to facilitate the development of certain

economic activities or of certain economic areas, subject to certain conditions. The Commission found that the measures were both proportionate and necessary to ensure the viability of Polish Regional Railways, and thus avoid the serious disturbance in the provision of an important service in Poland that the insolvency of the sole nationwide provider of regional passenger rail services would have caused. Furthermore, the [Fourth Railway Package](#) establishes that Member States will have to terminate the practice of directly and unconditionally awarding public service contracts in the regional passenger rail transport sector by 25 December 2023. In order to limit the possible negative effects of the aid on competition, Poland committed to accelerate the shift away from this practice and to complete this process earlier than required by the Railway Package. On this basis, the Commission considered that the positive effects of the measure outweigh its possible negative effects on competition and approved the measures under EU State aid rules. Executive Vice-President Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said: *"Our investigation showed that the Polish restructuring aid measures in favour of Polish Regional Railways were necessary and proportionate to ensure that the company could continue operating. This avoided serious disruptions in the provision of regional passenger rail transport and ensured connectivity in Poland. At the same time, the possible negative effects on competition brought about by the public intervention will be limited by Poland's commitment to accelerate the opening of the Polish regional passenger rail transport sector to competition."* A full press release is available [online](#). (For more information: Arianna Podesta – Tel. +32 229 87024; Giulia Astuti – Tel.: +32 229 55344)

Antitrust: Commission fines three EU railway companies €48 million for customer allocation cartel

The European Commission has fined railway companies Österreichische Bundesbahnen (ÖBB), Deutsche Bahn (DB) and Société Nationale des Chemins de fer belges / Nationale Maatschappij der Belgische Spoorwegen (SNCB) a total of €48 million for breaching EU antitrust rules. The companies participated in a customer allocation cartel which concerned

participated in a customer allocation cartel, which concerned cross-border rail cargo transport services on blocktrains on

key rail corridors in the EU. The three companies admitted their involvement in the cartel and agreed to settle the case. The infringement concerned cross-border rail cargo transport services in the EU provided by ÖBB, DB and SNCB under the freight sharing model and carried out in “blocktrains”. The Commission's investigation revealed that the three railway companies coordinated by exchanging collusive information on customer requests for competitive offers and provided each other with higher quotes to protect their respective business. The companies thus participated in a customer allocation scheme, which is prohibited under EU competition rules. Executive Vice-President Margrethe **Vestager**, in charge of competition policy, said: *“Rail transport of cargo is vital for a sustainable economy model. Fair competition is important to provide customers with the best offer when using sustainable transport. A cartel between key operators offering rail cargo services on essential rail corridors across the EU goes fundamentally against this objective. Today's decision sends a clear signal that this type of collusive behaviour is not acceptable.”* The full press release can be found [online](#). (For more information: Arianna Podesta – Tel. +32 229 87024; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Mergers: Commission to assess proposed acquisition of GRAIL by Illumina

The European Commission has accepted the requests submitted by Belgium, France, Greece, Iceland, the Netherlands, and Norway to assess the proposed acquisition of GRAIL by Illumina under the EU Merger Regulation. Illumina, based in the U.S., is a global genomics company and a leading supplier of next generation sequencing systems for genetic and genomic analysis. GRAIL, also based in the U.S., is a healthcare company, which develops cancer detection tests relying on next generation sequencing systems. The proposed acquisition does not reach the notification thresholds set out in the EU Merger Regulation, and it was not notified in any Member State. France submitted a referral request to the Commission pursuant to Article 22(1) of the EU Merger Regulation. This provision allows Member States to request the Commission to examine

allows member states to request the Commission to examine a merger that does not have an EU dimension but affects

trade within the single market and threatens to significantly affect competition within the territory of the Member States making the request. Other countries of the European Economic Area had the opportunity to join the original referral request. Subsequently, Belgium, Greece, Iceland, the Netherlands and Norway joined France's referral request. On the basis of the information provided by France and the other countries, and without prejudice to the outcome of its investigation, the Commission considers that the transaction meets the criteria for referral under the Article 22. In particular, the combined entity could restrict access to or increase prices of next generation sequencers and reagents to the detriment of GRAIL's rivals active in genomic cancer tests following the transaction. A referral of this transaction is appropriate because GRAIL's competitive significance is not reflected in its turnover, as notably evidenced by the USD 7.1 billion dollar deal value. Genomic cancer tests, having the potential to identify a wide variety of cancers in asymptomatic patients, are expected to be game-changers in the fight against cancer. It is therefore important to ensure that patients get access to this technology as quickly as possible, from as wide sources as possible, and at a fair price. As anticipated by Executive Vice-President Margrethe **Vestager** in her speech on [“The Future of merger control”](#), the Commission adopted on [26 March 2021](#) the [Article 22 Guidance](#). This Guidance describes the categories of cases that may constitute suitable candidates for a referral in situations where the transaction is not notifiable under the laws of the referring Member State(s), and sets out the criteria that the Commission may take into account in exercising its discretion to accept such referrals. The Commission has asked Illumina to notify the transaction. Illumina cannot implement the transaction before notifying and obtaining clearance from the Commission. *(For more information: Arianna Podesta – Tel. +32 229 87024; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

L'UE lance une initiative humanitaire d'un montant de 100 millions d'euros pour soutenir les campagnes de vaccination contre la COVID-19 en Afrique

Aujourd'hui, le commissaire chargé de la gestion des crises, Janez **Lenarčič**, se rendra dans les Centres africains de contrôle et de prévention des maladies (CDC Afrique) à Addis-Abeba. Cette visite marque le début de la mise en œuvre de la nouvelle initiative humanitaire de l'UE d'un montant de 100 millions d'euros en faveur des campagnes de vaccination contre la COVID-19 en Afrique. Comme l'a annoncé la présidente de la Commission européenne, Ursula **von der Leyen**, lors de la réunion du G7 en février 2021, cette initiative s'inscrit dans le cadre des efforts déployés par la Commission européenne pour garantir à tous un accès équitable et juste à des vaccins sûrs et efficaces. À l'issue de sa rencontre avec le chef de la Conférence des présidents des délégations pour l'Afrique, John Nkengasong, le commissaire **Lenarčič**, a souligné: *« Je suis heureux d'annoncer aujourd'hui le lancement d'un nouveau chapitre dans le cadre du partenariat de l'UE avec les Centres africains de prévention et de contrôle des maladies. Ce financement supplémentaire de l'UE en faveur du déploiement de campagnes de vaccination contre la pandémie de coronavirus en Afrique contribuera à faire en sorte que personne ne soit laissé pour compte, y compris les personnes vivant dans des situations de crise humanitaire rencontrant des difficultés d'accès. Je me réjouis à la perspective d'une coopération encore plus étroite à l'avenir avec la Conférence des présidents des délégations pour l'Afrique, afin de renforcer nos dispositions et notre capacité à répondre efficacement aux défis de demain. »* Plus de détails figurent dans le [communiqué de presse](#). (Pour plus d'informations: Balazs Ujvari — Tél.: + 32 229 54578; Daniel Puglisi- Tél.: +32 229 69140)

Commissioner Dalli attends high-level conference on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Commissioner for Equality, Helena **Dalli**, participated yesterday and today in [the high-level conference](#) on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, organised by the Portuguese Presidency. Yesterday, the Commissioner presented [the EU Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030](#), adopted by the Commission in March. She underlined the need to act together with Member States, other EU institutions and stakeholders – including organisations of persons with disabilities to implement the ambitious Strategy and ensure the full participation of people with disabilities in society, on an equal basis with others. Commissioner **Dalli** said: *“With our Strategy we aim to improve the lives of persons with disabilities in the EU and beyond. The conference is a timely launch of the important partnership for its implementation. Member States are of the essence in this endeavour: their engagement is essential to make this Strategy a success, taking us a step further towards a Union of Equality. Nothing about persons with disabilities without their involvement.”* Commissioner **Dalli**'s speech is available [online](#). Today, the Commissioner has opened a ministerial roundtable together with the Prime Minister of Portugal António Costa. The conference will be concluded in the afternoon with the closing remarks by Commission's Director-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Joost Korte and the Minister of Labour of Portugal, Ana Mendes Gondinho. The event is a step on the road to the [Social Summit in Porto on 7-8 May](#), which aims to reinforce the commitment from Member States, European institutions, social partners and civil society to the implementation of the [European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan](#). The outcome of the conference will also feed into the Council Conclusions on disability scheduled to be adopted at the June meeting of EU social affairs ministers. *(For more information: Christian Wigand - Tel.: +32 229 62253; Katarzyna Kolanko - Tel.: +32 229 63444; Jördis Ferrolí - Tel.: +32 229 92729)*

Nouveau Centre de connaissances sur l'observation de la Terre afin de renforcer l'élaboration de politiques fondées sur des données probantes

La Commission lance aujourd'hui un [Centre de connaissances sur l'observation de la Terre](#) afin d'optimiser

[connaissances sur l'observation de la Terre](#) afin d'optimiser l'utilisation des connaissances issues de l'observation de

notre planète, en particulier du programme européen

[Copernicus](#), dans l'élaboration des politiques de l'UE.

L'objectif ultime du Centre est de soutenir la mise en œuvre efficace des priorités politiques de la Commission, en

particulier le [pacte vert](#) pour l'Europe et la [stratégie](#)

[numérique](#). Il assurera un suivi systématique des besoins et

des priorités stratégiques pour les produits et services de

Copernicus. Il transformera également les meilleures

pratiques et les connaissances scientifiques de pointe en

services adaptés aux actions menées. Le Centre de

connaissances vise également à garantir que l'évolution du

programme Copernicus et d'autres investissements de la

Commission dans le domaine de l'observation de la Terre et

de la recherche continuent à répondre aux objectifs politiques

de l'UE. Pour plus d'informations, veuillez lire notre

[communiqué](#). *(Pour plus d'informations: Johannes Bahrke –*

Tél.: +32 229 58615; Sonya Gospodinova – Tél.: +32 229

66953; Sinéad Meehan–van Druten – Tél.: +32 229 84094;

Célia Dejond – Tél.: +32 229 88199)

Commission to launch New European Bauhaus prize at upcoming Conference

The European Commission is organising a dedicated [New](#)

[European Bauhaus Conference](#) on 22 and 23 April, some

three months after the launch of the initiative's 'co-design

phase'. The New European Bauhaus gives a cultural

dimension to the European Green Deal and aims at

accelerating the green transition of the built environment to

achieve our climate targets. The Conference will be opened

by Commission President, Ursula **von der Leyen**; European

Parliament President, David Sassoli; and Prime Minister of

Portugal, António Costa, on behalf of the Presidency of the

Council of the European Union. It will also hear from high-

level speakers, like politician and philanthropist, Mike

Bloomberg, grassroots activist and founder of shack dwellers

international, Sheela Patel, climate scientist, John

Schellnhuber, and other members of the [high-level](#)

[roundtable of experts](#) for the initiative. The Conference will

also see the launch of the first New European Bauhaus Prize.

Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education

Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, Mariya **Gabriel** and Commissioner for Cohesion

and Reforms, Elisa **Ferreira**, leading this initiative in the Commission, will participate and share their vision for the New European Bauhaus, the goals and aims, and the next steps. Commissioner **Gabriel** said: *“The New European Bauhaus is about hope, inspiration and new perspectives. This Conference will help us explore how to unleash and multiply the creative potential of our citizens to make a success of the initiative”*. Commissioner **Ferreira** said: *“The New European Bauhaus is an expression of a new mindset, combining sustainability, aesthetics and inclusion. Cohesion policy is a natural partner in this quest for green and inclusive regions, cities and villages. Let's put our minds and hearts in building a better home for the future! Because home is where the heart is”*. The Conference will be fully online and the programme is online [here](#). Interested media are invited to [register now](#). There will be an interactive press statement on EbS on Friday 23 April at 13:00 to launch the prize. Find out more about the initiative with these [frequently asked questions](#). (For more information: Vivian Loonela – Tel: +32 229 66712; Sinéad Meehan-van Druten – Tel.: +32 229 84094)

[Liste des points prévus](#) à l'ordre du jour des prochaines réunions de la Commission

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[Eurostat](#): communiqués de presse

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