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THE HERALD

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The European Commission on Wednesday unveiled initiatives for its digital single market strategy that could upend how 500 million people watch entertainment, buy online and use Internet platforms.



EUROZONE HAILS 'BREAKTHROUGH' WITH GREECE, IMF DEBT DEAL

REUTERS.COM

The euro zone gave Greece its firmest offer yet of debt relief in what finance ministers called a breakthrough deal that won a commitment from the IMF finally to return to taking part in the bailout for Athens.

After talks that lasted into the small hours of Wednesday, the Eurogroup ministers gave a nod to releasing 10.3 billion euros (£8 billion) in new funds for Greece in recognition of painful fiscal reforms pushed through by Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras's leftist-led coalition, subject to some final technical tweaks.

But a bigger step forward was a deal by which the euro zone agreed to offer Athens debt relief in 2018 if that is necessary to meet agreed criteria on its payments burden. That was enough to secure an agreement from the International Monetary Fund to again join the euro zone in funding the bailout of Greece.

"We achieved a major breakthrough on Greece which enables us to enter a new phase in the Greek financial assistance programme," Eurogroup President Jeroen Dijsselbloem, the Dutch finance minister, told a news conference. "This is stretching what I thought would have been possible not so long ago."

Acknowledging the "political capital" European ministers invested to reach the deal -- a nod to strong German objections to debt relief -- Dijsselbloem called it a "new phase" in a six-year drama to stabilise Greece's finances that has taken the 16-year-old euro zone to the brink of break-up.

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EU'S TUSK URGES GLOBAL SOLIDARITY ON REFUGEE CRISIS

REUTERS.COM



European Council President Donald Tusk said on Thursday he would like the global community to show solidarity regarding the refugee crisis and recognise it is a global problem. Tusk said he would seek G7 support and commitment to increasing global assistance for the immediate and long-term needs of refugees.

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GREECE PONDERS EUROGROUP DEAL AS DOUBTS EMERGE OVER IMF ROLE

EKATHIMERINI.COM



Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras said on Wednesday night that the agreement reached following a Eurogroup meeting in Brussels would usher in a "period of stability" but the International Monetary Fund indicated that it might not remain involved in the program because of differences with the eurozone over debt relief for Greece.

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NEW RULES SHOULD UNDERPIN, NOT UNDERMINE, THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

ECRGROUP.EU

Plans to force online retailers to open their websites to customers across the EU could reduce consumer choice, ECR MEPs have warned. The European Commission yesterday published a raft of proposals covering online sales and Internet audio visual services.

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GORDON BROWN CALLS FOR EU MIGRATION CASH TO SWAY UNDECIDED BREXIT VOTERS

EURACTIV.COM

Former UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown on Wednesday called for European cash for towns and cities struggling to cope with the refugee crisis, in a bid to convince 14 million undecided Brexit referendum voters to back staying in the EU.

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FRANCE USES STRATEGIC OIL RESERVES TO COUNTER REFINERY BLOCKADE

REUTERS.COM

France has started using its strategic oil reserves for the first time since 2010 to counter union blockades of its refineries, the French oil industry federation said on Wednesday. over the past week.

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FREED UKRAINIAN PILOT RETURNS HOME TO HERO'S WELCOME

IRISHTIMES.COM

Ukrainian servicewoman Nadiya Savchenko was heading home on a plane from Russian captivity on Wednesday, part of an exchange for two Russians detained in Ukraine.

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18% OF UNEMPLOYED PERSONS IN THE EU FOUND A JOB

EUROPA.EU

Out of all persons in the European Union (EU) who were unemployed in the third quarter 2015, 64.0% (12.5 million persons) remained unemployed in the fourth quarter 2015, while 17.7% (3.5 million) moved into employment and 18.4% (3.6 million) towards economic inactivity in Q4 2015.

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THE AGENDA

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EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

• **8:30 the plenary session continues in Brussels.** On the final draft agenda: DEBATES: Measures to address the crisis in the dairy sector - oral questions (rapporteur **Czesław Adam Siekierski**, EPP), Virtual currencies (rapporteur **Jakob von Weizsäcker**, S&D), The Single Market strategy (rapporteur **Lara Comi**, EPP). 11:30 VOTES followed by explanations of votes: Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: application EGF/2015/010 FR/MoryGlobal (rapporteur **Anneli Jäätteenmäki**, S&D), Mobilisation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund: application EGF/2015/011 GR/Supermarket Larissa (rapporteur **Liadh Ní Riada**, GUE/NGL), Provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Sweden (rapporteur **Ska Keller**, Greens/EFA), 71st session of the UN General Assembly (rapporteur **Andrey Kovatchev**, EPP), Transatlantic data flows - motions for resolutions, Delivering a new deal for energy consumers (rapporteur **Theresa Griffin**, S&D), Poverty: a gender perspective (rapporteur **Maria Arena**, S&D), Non-tariff barriers in the Single Market (rapporteur **Daniel Dalton**, ECR), The Single Market strategy (rapporteur **Lara Comi**, EPP).

• 15:00 President of the European Parliament **Martin Schulz** gives a keynote speech at the “**National Convention on the European Union**” (Congress Hall, Hlboká cesta 2, Bratislava).

• New initiatives **to allow consumers and companies to buy and sell products and services online more easily across the EU** were welcomed by most MEPs in a debate with Commission Vice-President for the Digital Single Market, **Andrus Ansip**, on Wednesday. Parliament will co-decide on equal footing with the EU Council of Ministers on **the Digital Single Market** legislative proposals.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

• Yesterday's **Eurogroup** agreement represents a breakthrough in several ways. It opens the way not only for the disbursement of the second tranche of the ESM programme amounting to EUR 10.3 bn but also for measures on debt relief, which will be implemented on a gradual basis. Above all, it will serve to create the conditions for the return of confidence, which is essential for a lasting **economic recovery in Greece**.

• The **European Investment Bank** has agreed to provide £525 million to build the **new Beatrice windfarm** 14 km off the Caithness coast, near Wick in north-east Scotland, UK. This transaction benefits from the support of **the European Fund for Strategic Investments**, the heart of the Investment Plan for Europe.

• The total number of **Galileo satellites** now in orbit has reached 14, following the successful launch of two more satellites from Europe's Spaceport in French Guyana on Tuesday.

WHO WHEN WHERE

• **The 42nd edition of the G7** is held under Japanese presidency. The European Union will be jointly represented by the President of the European Commission, **Jean-Claude Juncker**, and the President of the European Council, **Donald Tusk** (Ise-Shima, Japan).

• A two-day **'Brain Forum 2016'** starts in Lausanne, Switzerland. The forum connects researchers, engineers, healthcare professionals, entrepreneurs,

industrialists, investors, funding agencies and policy makers, to advance our understanding of how the brain works and to accelerate the application of that understanding to human needs.

• 10:30 **CEST Human rights conference** holds on in Belfast. Northern Ireland Ombudsman will be speaking at the conference on the topic of Think Regional, Think Global: Human Rights Challenges for Ombudsmen and Human Rights Institutions in the 21st Century.

• Saturday 10:00 **'Open days'** takes place in Brussels. The European Parliament and other EU institutions will give citizens a chance to discover their daily work at the 24th edition of the Open Days.

TODAY CELEBRATING BIRTHDAYS



Julia PITERA
EPP
(63)



Ulrike LUNACEK
Greens/EFA
(59)



Claude ROLIN
EPP
(59)



Pavel POC
S&D
(59)



Emil RADEV
EPP
(45)