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# EU Alert

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## **EESC Highlights the Need of a Single European Sky After the Ash Crisis**

The EESC asks the Member States and the Commission for prompt measures to realise the "Single European Sky" and for developing a more modern and integrated vision of the air transport sector. Recent days revealed the need for increased European co-ordination in the air transport sector. European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), which represents European civil society, is convinced that the "ash crisis" would have been solved more efficiently with the SES in place. This initiative was supported by the European Parliament and Council over a year ago. The EESC stressed already in a 2009 own-initiative opinion that the resilience of the European aviation is at stake and the sector needs a special and urgent focus of the EU institutions. Several measures were proposed focusing on the urgent implementation and enforcement of the already existing legislation. The bailout package to help recover the air transportation sector from the ash crisis should be considered given the potential deepening of the current economic downturn.

<http://euroalert.net/en/news.aspx?idn=9851>

## **Commission Proposes That Estonia Will Join Euro Area in 2011**

The European Commission has issued its 2010 Convergence Report. It assesses progress with convergence in countries with derogation from euro area membership. The nine Member States with a so-called 'derogation' have made uneven progress on the road to the single currency, and eight of them do not yet meet all the conditions for euro adoption. However, Estonia stands out from the group, fulfilling the criteria clearly, as a result of determined and efficient efforts by the Estonian government and Estonian people. Therefore, the Commission concluded that Estonia meets the criteria for adopting the euro and made a proposal to the Council to this effect.

The Council of EU finance ministers (ECOFIN) will take the final decision on the adoption of the euro in Estonia in July, after the Parliament has given its opinion and the EU Heads of State and Government have discussed the subject at their summit meeting in June.

<http://euroalert.net/en/news.aspx?idn=9848>

## **European Agreement to Reduce School Drop-Out Rate**

All the EU education ministers except the British minister whose country is in the process of forming government, backed the Spanish Presidency proposal to reduce the average school drop-out rate to 10 per cent by 2020 (currently, the average rate is 15 per cent) and increase to 40 per cent the number of university graduates or those with higher-level vocation training.

The Spanish Presidency will submit this proposal to the Council of EU Heads of States and Governments in June with "absolute confidence" that the numerical commitments will be endorsed at the meeting, Spain's Education Minister, Ángel Gabilondo, told a press conference after the council of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport that is taking place in Brussels.

<http://euroalert.net/en/news.aspx?idn=9844>

## 10 Million Items Available in Europeana Thanks to the European Council

European cultural and scientific heritage will be accessible to all the EU citizens with the aim of making 10 million objects available, including movies, books, newspapers, photographs, paintings and maps through the website Europeana.

Currently the tool allows access to more than 7 million digitized works and it can be consolidated as a reference point for European culture on the Internet. Europeana is a single multilingual online portal, hosted by the Dutch National Library. The prototype was launched in November 2008 after months of work and, according to the Ministers, it should continue to improve its site with a more attractive presentation of the items, enhanced search facilities and full multilingual functionality.

<http://euroalert.net/en/news.aspx?idn=9839>

## MEPs Back European Rules on Organ Donations and Transplants

People needing organ transplants should face shorter waiting times after Parliament approved a draft directive on quality and safety standards for human organs used for transplants. The directive covers all stages of the chain from donation to transplantation and provides for cooperation between Member States. Over the past 50 years organ transplants have become an established practice worldwide. Yet the queues are long - about 60,000 patients are now on waiting lists in the EU - and every day 12 people die while on a list. Common quality and safety standards are needed at EU level to facilitate the donation, transplantation and exchange of organs. Parliament today voted by 643 votes to 16 with 8 abstentions to endorse an agreement with the Council on a directive laying down such standards.

<http://euroalert.net/en/news.aspx?idn=9870>

## New Steps to Improve the Management of Bio-Waste

The European Commission has laid out steps to improve the management of bio-waste in the EU and tap into its significant environmental and economic benefits. Bio-degradable garden, kitchen and food waste accounts for 88 million tonnes of municipal waste each year and has major potential impacts on the environment. But it also has considerable promise as a renewable source of energy and recycled materials. A Commission assessment has identified significant environmental and economic benefits from improved management of bio-waste in the European Union. Commission's Communication lays out recommendations on the way forward to reap these benefits in full. The most promising approaches include the prevention of bio-waste and biological treatment with the production of compost and biogas.

The main environmental threat from bio-waste is the production of methane, a powerful greenhouse gas 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide. If biological treatment of waste was maximized, the most visible and significant benefit would be avoided greenhouse gas emissions – estimated at around 10 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent in 2020.

<http://euroalert.net/en/news.aspx?idn=9867>

## Digital Economy, Clue for Europe's Future Prosperity

European Commission has published a report that says that Europe's digital economy is growing in strength, spreading throughout all sectors of the economy and reaching into all areas of our lives. However, if Europe wants to fully exploit the potential benefits of the digital economy, it must step up a gear and provide faster broadband and an internet people trust, improve citizens' skills, and encourage even more ICT innovation. The report, which can be accessed in the Information Society website of the European Commission, analyses recent developments in the ICT field. It provides significant evidence for the design of a Digital Agenda for Europe, the first European Commission flagship initiative to be launched shortly under the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

<http://euroalert.net/en/news.aspx?idn=9860>

## Spain Tests Automated Border Control System for EU

Spain has set up a pilot project that will help travellers move faster through border crossing points within the European Union, through the use of an automated identification and document verification system, overseen by police officers.

The Automated Border Control (ABC) System, which can be used by citizens of the EU, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland aged over 18 and who have a biometric passport or electronic national identity document was unveiled by Spain's Minister of the Interior, Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba, at El Prat Airport in Barcelona.

With a large number of travellers being directed to the automated controls, resources could be freed up and focused on areas that require greater vigilance.

<http://euroalert.net/en/news.aspx?idn=9852>

## EUR 400 Million for Financing Educational Facilities

The European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Government of Andalusia have signed in Seville a EUR 400 million loan for financing the construction of new schools and refurbishment of existing facilities throughout Andalusia.

The bulk of the loan will go towards the construction of new schools under the "Andalusia Schools" programme. Another large chunk will finance the refurbishment and enlargement of 692 state schools spread throughout the region and accommodating some 175 000 children, along with the 2009-2011 equipment purchasing programme.

The Government of Andalusia has also launched an education improvement programme, which mainly comprises in-service teacher training courses and quality assurance audits.

<http://euroalert.net/en/news.aspx?idn=9862>

## Consultation: General Product Safety Directive

The framework set up under the two successive General Product Safety Directives - Directive 92/59/EC and 2001/95/EC - has built up, in almost two decades, a system that fosters a general culture that all consumer products must be safe, and integrates the role of European standards for otherwise non-harmonised products. However, recurrent product safety alerts, either of global or regional relevance, have made it clear that we need a system that delivers more rapidly, efficiently and consistently throughout the EU and which, at the same time, is flexible enough to adapt to the challenges of globalisation and continue to contribute to the EU internal market of safe products.

[http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/safety/prod\\_legis/GPSD\\_consultation/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/consumers/safety/prod_legis/GPSD_consultation/index_en.htm)

## Consultation: Public Concession Contracts

Concession contracts are a common way of delivering public tasks. They are arrangements between public authorities and private operators, with the purpose of providing and exploiting an infrastructure, such as i.a. an airport (works concessions) or provision and exploitation of a service, such as i.a. water distribution (services concessions), to the public.

Concessions play a particularly prominent role in situations where innovation or substantial investments in public infrastructure are required, particularly in order to meet new environmental and social standards. The Commission is in the process of assessing the need for and impact of an initiative on concessions with a view to improving the current binding framework. In this context, the aim of this questionnaire is to learn from your participation in and experience with concessions, to hear your views on how the present rules work and to gather your suggestions for improvements.

<http://ec.europa.eu/yourvoice/ipm/forms/dispatch?form=Concessionsquest#%5Fen.htm>

**If you have any queries about the EU Alert bulletin, or would like some more information about any of the topics in this edition, please contact Enterprise Europe West Midlands on 0121 455 0268**

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