European Commission - Daily News





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Vaccines: Commission hosts first EU matchmaking event to mobilise Europe's full potential for the production of COVID-19 vaccines

Today, the Commission is hosting the first pan-European matchmaking event with over 300 participating companies from 25 Member States to expand COVID-19 vaccine production capacities across Europe and address production and supply chain bottlenecks. The event aims to speed up connections between vaccine producers and service companies such as contract development and manufacturing organisations, fill and finish, equipment producers and others, with a view to improve planning for current and future vaccine production in Europe. Executive Vice-President Margrethe **Vestager** said: "The number and variety of players attending the matchmaking event showcases the importance of having a vibrant, competitive pharmaceutical industry in the EU. Cooperation to combine complementary assets and increase vaccine capacity can be decisive in speeding up the vaccination of European citizens and overcoming the outbreak - for this reason, the Commission has issued an antitrust comfort letter which facilitates matchmaking between companies while protecting fair competition." Commissioner Thierry Breton, responsible for the Internal Market, said: "The ramp-up of vaccine production in Europe is unprecedented, both for our immediate and mediumterm vaccination needs. We are working with industry to make better use of existing capacity and build new capability all around Europe. The matchmaking event is all about fostering new connections and partnerships across the production and supply chain. I encourage the many companies involved in the vaccine manufacturing process to make the most of the matchmaking opportunities." Organised online by the Commission's Task Force for the Industrial Scale-up of COVID-19 vaccine production, the event is taking place on 29 and 31 March. The first day of the event, opened by a keynote address by Commissioner Breton, is dedicated to matchmaking among manufacturing companies dealing with raw materials, manufacturing, coupling and formulation and fill and finish of vaccines. The event's second day on Wednesday will focus on ensuring connections with potential suppliers from across the vaccine production value chain, including companies involved in packaging, storage, shipment and distribution and production of accessories such as syringes and vials. In order to facilitate the matchmaking, the Commission has also issued a comfort letter providing guidance on how the matchmaking and exchanges between participating companies, including direct competitors, can take place in compliance with the EU competition rules. The comfort letter is based on the Antitrust Temporary Framework adopted by the Commission on 8 April 2020. The matchmaking event is organised by the European Cluster Collaboration Platform in partnership with the Council of European BioRegions (CEBR) and the European Cluster Alliance (ECA), which also supported the Commission in analysing and identifying EU capacities for COVID-19 vaccines production, on the basis of which companies were invited to participate in the matchmaking. (For more information: Sonya Gospodinova - Tel.: +32 229 66953; Federica Miccoli - Tel.: +32 229 58300)

Brussels V Conference 'Supporting the future of Syria and the region': highlighting the role of civil society

The fifth edition of the <u>Brussels Conference on 'Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region'</u> (#SyriaConf2021) started this morning with the Day of Dialogue with civil society organisations from Syria and the region. Today's discussions with civil society, Ministers and senior decision-makers from refugee-hosting countries, the EU, the United Nations, international NGOs and other international partners focused on the main issues at stake in the Syrian crisis. The debates are designed around an <u>online consultation</u> run by the European Union in March. Panels on 'Economic development and sustainable livelihoods in the region'; on 'Food Security and Livelihoods Humanitarian Response' and on 'A Path to Justice and Peace: Accountability, Detainees Release and Missing Persons in Syria' can be followed <u>online</u>. Tomorrow, High Representative/Vice-President Josep **Borrell** and UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordination, Mark Lowcock, will co-chair the opening session of the Ministerial segment of the

Conference, followed by interventions by UN Secretary General António Guterres, UN Special Envoy for Syria Geir Pedersen, representatives of the three main refugee-hosting Neighbours Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey and other participants. It will gather over 77 delegates from more than 50 countries and over a dozen international organisations. Commissioner for Crisis Management, Janez Lenarčič, will also address the crucial political, regional development and humanitarian aspects of the crisis. Civil society representatives from inside Syria and the region will convey the main recommendations resulting from the online consultation process. The entire Ministerial meeting will be live on EbS as well as web-streamed and starts at 13:00. A press conference with High Representative Borrell and UN Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock will take place at 14:50. Pledges will be announced in the closing session at \pm -20:00. From 15 to 26 March, a record number of 40 side events hosted by EU Member States, partner countries, UN agencies and other international organisations also took place online. The side events focused on a wide range of topics, from disability to independent media. To highlight the diversity and the richness of Syrian culture, the EU, in cooperation with Lagrange Points Brussels, is organising four virtual concerts featuring a variety of Syrian musicians, Sufi whirling and poetry artists; an online introduction to Syrian cuisine; and an exhibition at Lagrange Points Brussels. All videos remain available online. Portraits from the exhibition 'Voices from Syria and the Region' are still available online and around Brussels, check the locations here. More information on the Conference, including the full programme and link to the live webcast, is available here. See also a media advisory and factsheets on EU's response to the Syrian crisis and on EU assistance's impact inside Syria, in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. (For more information: Nabila Masrali - Tel: +32 229 88093; Daniel Puglisi - Tel.: +32 229 69140; Zoï Muletier - Tel.: +32 229 94306)

European Green Deal: Commission launched public consultation on decarbonising the EU gas market

Last Friday, the Commission launched a <u>public consultation</u> on the revision of the <u>Gas Directive</u> and <u>Gas Regulation</u>. This legislation is being revised to align it to the ambition of the <u>European Green Deal</u> to decarbonise the EU gas sector on the path to achieving climate neutrality by 2050. All stakeholders are invited to share their views during the next 12 weeks, until 18 June, on how the existing EU gas legislation should be revised to support the uptake of renewable and low-carbon gases and hydrogen, while ensuring integrated, liquid and interoperable EU markets. The results of this consultation will feed into the legislative proposals due before the end of the year, as announced in the <u>2021 Commission's Work Programme</u>. Ahead of this revision of the EU's gas legislation, the Commission plans to present the 'Fit for 55' package this June to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 and pave the way towards climate-neutrality goal by mid-century. More information is available <u>here</u>. (For more information: Vivian Loonela - Tel.: +32 229 66712; Ana Crespo Parrondo - Tel: +32 229 81325)

European Year of Rail: Hop on the Connecting Europe Express

The Connecting Europe Express, one of the European Year of Rail 2021's most emblematic initiatives, is being presented today during the official European Year of Rail kick-off conference, organised in cooperation with the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU. The event takes place on the eve of an informal meeting of EU Transport Ministers focusing on different ways to accelerate a modal shift to rail. As of September, the Connecting Europe Express will travel across the EU and stop in most European capitals to promote the many benefits of rail - for passengers, freight and the environment. The project will also raise awareness of the importance of financing sustainable infrastructure such as rail, and EU support for such investment, including through the recently agreed new Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), worth €33.7 billion, as part of the next long-term EU budget 2021-2027. The train's journey is possible thanks to good cooperation between European rail operators and infrastructure managers. Commissioner for Transport, Adina Vălean, said: "The Connecting Europe Express will be a real, tangible example of the power of rail to connect. At each of the almost 40 stops, events will bring together the rail sector at large, as well as civil society organisations, local and regional authorities, and the wider public, to discuss the benefits of rail, as well as what still has to be done so that rail can become the number one option for passengers and business." (For more information: Vivian Loonela - Tel.: +32 229 66712; Stephan Meder - Tel: +32 229 13917)

La Commission lance un appel à candidatures pour participer au 'Youth Sounding Board' : Comité d'écoute des jeunes pour les partenariats internationaux

La Commission a lancé aujourd'hui un appel à candidatures pour participer à un Comité d'écoute des

jeunes pour les partenariats internationaux : le <u>Youth Sounding Board for International Partnerships</u>. Ce comité conseillera la commissaire chargée des partenariats internationaux, Jutta Urpilainen, sur la pertinence et l'efficacité de l'action extérieure de l'UE en faveur de la jeunesse. La commissaire Urpilainen a déclaré : « Du changement climatique à la numérisation, et de l'éducation à l'emploi, les jeunes ont des espoirs et des ambitions. Ils veulent vraiment participer et doivent être encouragés et responsabilisés. Il n'y a pas d'avenir sans jeunesse. Il est temps de donner aux jeunes une place là où ça compte : à la table des décisions. » Le Youth Sounding Board sera composé de 25 jeunes de divers milieux, âgés de 18 à 30 ans, originaires d'Afrique, d'Asie, du Pacifique, du Moyen-Orient, d'Amérique latine et des Caraïbes, ainsi que de l'UE. Pendant un mandat de deux ans, les membres conseilleront l'action extérieure de l'UE sur un large éventail de thèmes, tels que l'emploi et l'éducation environnementale, le changement climatique, la numérisation, les droits de l'homme, la démocratie, le genre, l'inclusion sociale et à la santé, ainsi que la culture, les arts et les médias. En plus de donner aux jeunes une plateforme pour influencer l'action extérieure de l'UE, le Youth Sounding Board vise à créer des opportunités de connexion et d'échange pour les jeunes et les organisations de jeunesse de l'UE et des pays partenaires. Les candidatures sont ouvertes jusqu'au 26 avril 2021. Pour plus de détails consultez le site web du Youth Sounding Board. (Pour plus d'informations : Ana Pisonero Hernandez - Tél.: +32 229 54320; Daniel Puglisi - Tél.: +32 229 69140)

Coronavirus: EU helps to deliver vaccines to Moldova and medical items to Montenegro and North Macedonia

The EU has supported Romania in delivering 50,400 doses of vaccines to Moldova in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This delivery follows Moldova's request for vaccines through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. The Commission coordinates and finances up to 75% of the costs for transporting the assistance. The EU will also mobilise medical items via its RescEU medical reserve to North Macedonia and Montenegro to help them cope with the pandemic. Commissioner for Crisis Management, Janez Lenarčič, said: "The EU continues to support its neighbours in the fight against the pandemic. I thank all the Member States for their solidarity. I thank, in particular Romania, for once again helping Moldova through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. We can only beat this pandemic together." Since the beginning of the pandemic, Moldova has received a range of assistance coordinated through the Mechanism, including 21,600 doses of COVID-19 vaccines from Romania in February 2021. The EU will also mobilise its RescEU medical reserve hosted in Germany, Belgium, Greece and Romania to send 1.2 million items of personal protective equipment to North Macedonia and Montenegro. The EU Civil Protection Mechanism has coordinated and co-financed the delivery of over 23 million items of assistance to 31 countries to support their COVID-19 response, be it personal protective equipment, ventilators, the reinforcement of medical staff, or, more recently, vaccines. Read the full press release here. (For more information: Balazs Ujvari - Tel.: +32 229 54578; Daniel Puglisi - Tel.: +32 229 69140)

State aid: Commission approves modified German support scheme for offshore wind energy

The European Commission has approved, under EU State aid rules, a German operating aid scheme to further develop offshore wind energy generation in Germany (modified 'WindSeeG'). The scheme, that will replace support for offshore wind under an existing scheme that the Commission approved as part of a 2017 State aid decision in case <u>SA.45461</u>, will increase the target for installed offshore wind capacity from 15 Gigawatt (GW) to 20 GW by 2030 and set a target of 40 GW of installed offshore capacity by 2040. Like the existing scheme, the new scheme is based on the centralised model, where the State pre-selects and tenders specific sites for offshore wind development. The aid will be granted in the form of a premium on top of the electricity market price, that will be set on the basis of the lowest bid in open and transparent competitive tenders, and will be paid for a period of 20 years. The scheme is approved until 2026. The Commission assessed the scheme under the EU State aid rules, in particular the rules on aid to energy from renewable resources under the 2014 Guidelines on State aid for environmental protection and energy. The Commission found that the aid is proportionate and limited to the minimum necessary, as the level of aid will be set through competitive tenders. Furthermore, the Commission found that the positive effects of the measure in terms of environmental benefits outweigh any possible negative effects of the measure in terms of distortions to competition. Germany also committed to carry out an ex-post evaluation of the scheme. The Commission concluded that the measure will further encourage the development of offshore wind energy and help Germany meet its medium- and long-term environmental goals, in line with the objectives of the European Green Deal, without unduly distorting competition. On this basis, the Commission approved the scheme under EU State aid rules. More information will be available on the Commission's competition website, in the public case register under the case

Aides d'État: la Commission autorise une aide italienne de 24,7 millions d'euros visant à indemniser Alitalia pour les nouveaux dommages subis en raison de la pandémie du coronavirus

La Commission européenne a conclu qu'une aide italienne d'un montant de 24,7 millions d'euros en faveur d'Alitalia était conforme aux règles de l'UE en matière d'aides d'État. Cette mesure vise à compenser les dommages subis par la compagnie aérienne sur certaines liaisons en raison de la pandémie de coronavirus entre le 1^{er} novembre et le 31 décembre 2020. L'Italie a notifié à la Commission une nouvelle mesure d'aide destinée à indemniser Alitalia pour les nouveaux dommages subis sur certaines liaisons entre le 1^{er} novembre 2020 et le 31 décembre 2020 en raison des mesures d'urgence qui ont été nécessaires pour limiter la propagation du virus. La Commission a examiné la mesure au regard de l'article 107, paragraphe 2, point b), du traité sur le fonctionnement de l'Union européenne (TFUE), qui permet à la Commission d'autoriser les aides d'État accordées par les États membres afin d'indemniser certaines entreprises ou certains secteurs pour des dommages causés directement par des événements extraordinaires. La Commission a constaté que la mesure italienne compenserait les dommages subis par Alitalia qui sont directement liés à l'épidémie de coronavirus, étant donné que la perte de rentabilité sur les liaisons admissibles du fait des mesures de confinement pendant la période en question peut être considérée comme un dommage directement lié à l'événement exceptionnel. Sur cette base, la Commission a conclu que la nouvelle mesure d'indemnisation italienne est conforme aux règles de l'UE en matière d'aides d'État. Margrethe Vestager, vice-présidente exécutive chargée de la politique de concurrence, a déclaré : « La crise du coronavirus et les restrictions visant à limiter la propagation du virus se poursuivent plus longtemps que nous l'avions tous espéré. La mesure autorisée aujourd'hui permet à l'Italie d'accorder une nouvelle indemnisation pour les dommages directs subis par Alitalia entre novembre et décembre 2020 en raison de ces restrictions. Nous continuons de travailler en étroite collaboration avec les États membres pour faire en sorte que des mesures nationales de soutien puissent être mises en place de manière coordonnée et efficace, conformément aux règles de l'UE. Parallèlement, nos enquêtes sur les mesures d'aide dont Alitalia a bénéficié par le passé suivent leur cours et nous sommes en contact avec les autorités italiennes pour ce qui est de leurs projets et du respect des règles de l'UE. » Le communiqué de presse est disponible en ligne. (Pour plus d'informations: Arianna Podesta - Tél.: +32 229 87024; Giulia Astuti - Tél.: +32 229 55344; Maria Tsoni - Tél.: +32 229 90526)

State aid: Commission approves Czech guarantee scheme for companies affected by coronavirus outbreak and modification to existing guarantee scheme for loans to large exporting companies T

The European Commission has approved a Czech scheme ('COVID Invest') for guarantees on new investment loans to support lending to companies affected by the coronavirus outbreak, as well as the modification of an existing scheme ('COVID Plus'), which provides guarantees to large exporting companies. The two schemes were approved under the State aid Temporary Framework. The 'COVID Invest' scheme approved today will share its budget with an earlier scheme ('COVID III'), which was approved by the Commission on 15 May 2020 (SA.57195). These two measures can jointly generate loans with a nominal amount of up to approximately €19.3 billion (CZK 500 billion). The 'COVID Invest' scheme will provide guarantees on new investment loans to SMEs and large enterprises with up to 500 employees active in all sectors, excluding the financial sector as well as companies active in the extraction or manufacturing of coal, petroleum, or gas, tobacco manufacturing and retail sales, and, gambling and betting activities. The scheme will provide guarantees on loans addressing the liquidity needs of firms whose financial needs have increased significantly over the past year, including fast-growth companies, start-ups and scale-ups. The scheme will be managed by the Czech promotional bank (CMZRB). The Commission found that the 'COVID Invest' scheme is in line with the conditions set out in the Temporary Framework. In particular, (i) it covers guarantees on new investment loans with a limited maturity and size; (ii) it is limited in time; (iii) it limits the risk taken by the State up to a maximum of 90%; (iv) it provides for adequate remuneration of the guarantees; and (v) it contains safeguards to ensure that the aid is effectively channelled by the banks or other financial institutions to the beneficiaries in need. With regard to the existing "COVID Plus" scheme, which was originally approved by the Commission on 5 May 2020 (SA.57094), and subsequently modified on 20 July 2020 (SA.58015) and 23 December 2020 (SA.60374), the modification approved today expands the sectoral scope of the scheme, by including companies in the accommodation business. All other conditions of the existing scheme remain unchanged. The

Commission concluded that the "COVID Invest" scheme and the amended "COVID Plus" scheme are necessary, appropriate and proportionate to remedy a serious disturbance in the economy of a Member State, in line with Article 107(3)(b) TFEU and the conditions set out in the Temporary Framework. More information on the Temporary Framework and other actions taken by the Commission to address the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic can be found here. The non-confidential version of the decision will be made available under the case numbers SA.61470 and SA.61824 in the State aid register on the Commission's competition website once any confidentiality issues have been resolved. (For more information: Marta Wieczorek – Tel. +32 229 58197; Giulia Astuti – Tel.: +32 229 55344; Maria Tsoni – Tel.: +32 229 90526)

State aid: Commission approves €6.5 million Belgian scheme to support pig farmers affected by coronavirus outbreak

The European Commission has approved a €6.5 million Belgian scheme to support pig farmers with breeding sows in the Walloon region in the context of the coronavirus outbreak. The scheme was approved under the State Aid Temporary Framework. Under the scheme, the public support will take the form of direct grants of up to €100,000 per beneficiary, to partially address the loss of income they incurred due to the coronavirus outbreak. The Commission found that the Belgian scheme is in line with the conditions of the Temporary Framework. In particular, (i) the aid does not exceed the limits per beneficiary active in the primary agricultural sector provided by the Temporary Framework; and (ii) the scheme will run until 31 December 2021. The Commission concluded that the measure is necessary, appropriate and proportionate to remedy a serious disturbance in the economy of a Member State, in line with Article 107(3)(b) TFEU and the conditions set out in the Temporary Framework. On this basis, the Commission approved the scheme under EU State aid rules. More information on the Temporary Framework and other actions taken by the Commission to address the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic can be found here. The non-confidential version of the decision will be made available under the case number SA.62393 in the State aid register on the Commission's competition website once any confidentiality issues have been resolved. (For more information: Marta Wieczorek - Tel. +32 229 58197; Giulia Astuti - Tel.: +32 229 55344; Maria Tsoni - Tel.: +32 229 90526)

State aid: Commission approves modifications to four Hungarian schemes to support companies in the context of coronavirus outbreak

The European Commission has found certain modifications to four existing Hungarian aid schemes to support companies affected by the coronavirus outbreak to be in line with EU State aid rules. The original schemes were approved by the Commission under the State aid Temporary Framework (case numbers SA.57269, SA.58420, SA.57064 and SA.59477). With respect to the first three schemes, Hungary notified certain amendments, including limited budget increases and an extension of the deadline for the beneficiaries to submit applications to receive the aid. With respect to the fourth scheme (SA.59477), that the Commission originally approved on 10 December 2020 and which includes a wage subsidy measure in the form of tax exemptions, Hungary notified the following modifications: (i) an extension of the scope of beneficiaries, in order to enable the Hungarian authorities to grant support also to self-employed individuals by lifting their obligation to pay social contribution tax and lump-sum tax; and (ii) an increase in the budget of the scheme, from approximately €315 million (HUF 115.5 billion) to approximately €625 million (HUF 228 billion). The Commission found that the modifications of the schemes are line with the conditions set out in the Temporary Framework. Among others, the aid will be granted until 31 December 2021. The Commission concluded that the schemes, as modified, remain necessary, appropriate and proportionate to remedy a serious disturbance in the economy of a Member State, in line with Article 107(3)(b) TFEU and the conditions set out in the Temporary Framework. On this basis, the Commission approved the amended schemes under EU State aid rules. The non-confidential version of the decision will be made available under the case numbers SA.62250, SA.62359 and SA.62268 in the State aid register on the Commission's competition website once any confidentiality issues have been resolved. (For more information: Marta Wieczorek - Tel. +32 229 58197; Giulia Astuti - Tel.: +32 229 55344; Maria Tsoni - Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Mergers: Commission announces evaluation results and follow-up measures on jurisdictional and procedural aspects of EU merger control

The European Commission has published on 26 March a <u>Staff Working Document</u> that summarises the findings of the evaluation of procedural and jurisdictional aspects of EU merger control. Following the results of the evaluation, the Commission decided to adopt a communication providing guidance

on the application of the referral mechanism between Member States and the Commission set out in Article 22 of the Merger Regulation, and launch an impact assessment on exploring policy options for further targeting and simplification of merger procedures. The objective of the evaluation was to assess the functioning of selected aspects of EU merger control to understand how the rules have worked in changing market realities. In view of the findings of the evaluation, the Commission intends, in certain circumstances, to encourage and accept referrals in cases where the referring Member State does not have initial jurisdiction over the case, where the criteria of Article 22 are met. The objective of the Article 22 Guidance adopted today is to facilitate and clarify the Commission's approach in this respect and to complement the guidance provided in the Commission Notice on Case Referral. The Commission has committed to focus its resources on relevant cases and reduce administrative burden where possible without compromising effective enforcement. In view of this and the results of the evaluation, the Commission has also launched today an impact assessment on the revision of certain procedural aspects of EU merger control. The initiative will assess policy options to achieve further targeting and simplification of the procedures through a revision of the Merger Implementing Regulation and the Notice on Simplified Procedure. The Commission has launched today a public consultation, with a view to gather further information and seek views from stakeholders. Stakeholders are invited to submit their views on the Commission's consultation website until 18 June 2021. Executive Vice-President Margrethe Vestager, in charge of competition policy, said: "The EU merger procedures have served us well so far. Our evaluation however has identified some areas for improvement. A number of transactions involving companies with low turnover, but high competitive potential in the internal market are not reviewed by either the Commission or the Member States. A more frequent use of the existing tool of referrals under Article 22 of the Merger Regulation can help us capture concentrations which may have a significant impact on competition in the internal market. In parallel, we are also looking at the possible revision of certain procedural aspects of EU merger control. To this end, we invite input from stakeholders on different policy options to achieve further targeting and simplification of the EU merger control procedures." The full press release is available online. (For more information: Arianna Podesta - Tel. +32 229 87024; Giulia Astuti - Tel.: +32 229 55344; Maria Tsoni - Tel.: +32 229 90526)

Concentrations: la Commission autorise l'acquisition du contrôle conjoint de Capveriant par la Caisse des dépôts et consignations et Deutsche Pfandbriefbank

La Commission a approuvé, en vertu du règlement européen sur les concentrations, l'acquisition de Capveriant Gmbh (« Capveriant »), basée en Allemagne, par la Caisse des dépôts et consignations (« CDC »), basée en France, et Deutsche Pfandbriefbank AG (« PBB »), basée en Allemagne. Capveriant est une plateforme numérique mettant en relation les entités du secteur public avec des préteurs proposant des prêts et obligations. Elle a été lancée par PBB et opère actuellement en Allemagne et en France. CDC est un établissement public au service de l'intérêt général et du développement économique de la France. PBB est active dans le secteur de la finance bancaire. L'opération entraîne des chevauchements horizontaux sur le marché de la fourniture de services de courtage pour les obligations nominatives et au porteur et les billets à ordre sur lequel La Banque Postale (« LBP », détenue par CDC), PBP et Capveriant sont actives. L'opération entraîne aussi des relations verticales entre les activités de marché numérique de crédit réalisées par Capveriant pour le secteur public et les activités de financement du secteur public réalisées par LBP. La Commission a conclu que l'acquisition envisagée ne soulèverait pas de problème de concurrence sur les marchés mentionnés ci-dessus, compte tenu des faibles parts de marché cumulées des entreprises. L'opération a été examinée dans le cadre de la procédure simplifiée du contrôle des concentrations. Plus d'informations sont disponibles sur le site internet de la Commission, dans le registre public des affaires concurrence sous le numéro M.10043. (Pour plus d'informations: Marta Wieczorek - Tél. +32 229 58197; Maria Tsoni - Tél.: +32 229 90526)