#TRENDY THURSDAY

by **ARPA** EU AFFAIRS AND COMMUNICATIONS

EUROPEAN UNION

Former EU lawmakers to be barred from lobbying for six months

The Parliament is proposing to ban former MEPs from lobbying the institution for six months after leaving. This move is in response to the Qatargate corruption scandal, which saw some MEPs arrested for receiving payments from the Emirati state for political support. The proposal would bring the Parliament's rules on former MEPs in line with other EU institutions. The blueprint will include plans for increased scrutiny of special interest groups, mandatory recording of meetings and gifts, and total control of the Foreign Affairs Committee on relations with third countries.

TECHNOLOGY

AI Act: EU Parliament's crunch time on high-risk categorisation, prohibited practices

European Parliament co-rapporteurs Brando Benifei and Dragoș Tudorache have proposed compromise amendments to the Artificial Intelligence Act, which aims to regulate AI and its potential harm. Among the pending issues to be resolved are the list of high-risk AI applications, banned uses, and concept definitions. The high-risk list includes biometric identification and categorization, safety components for infrastructure, personal learning systems, employment decisions, public services, and AI systems for vulnerable groups. Prohibited practices include subliminal techniques and AI models intentionally designed to exploit vulnerabilities.

TECHNOLOGY

European Innovation Council Fund injects €331 million of equity into European deep-tech companies

The European Innovation Council Fund has invested in 42 deep-tech start-ups for a total of €331 million. 13 of these companies have already signed their investment agreements. The EIC Fund is a significant source of funding for start-ups and small businesses in Europe, providing equity investments from €500,000 to €15 million per company, in addition, to grant financing of up to €2.5 million. The EIC Fund is now fully operational and on track to sign grant agreements with selected companies within 4-5 months.

EUROPEAN UNION

EU agrees on level of price caps for Russian petroleum products

The EU Council has agreed to set two price caps for Russian petroleum products falling under CN code 2710. The first price cap for petroleum products traded at a discount to crude oil is set at $45 per barrel, while the second price cap for petroleum products traded at a premium to crude is set at $100 per barrel. The level of the cap was established in cooperation with the Price Cap Coalition and will become effective on February 5, 2023. The Council will regularly review the price cap mechanism for crude oil starting in mid-March.

INDUSTRY

Startups: EU response to US subsidies must go beyond state aid, tackle procurement rules

A group of European start-up organizations, including France Digitale and the European Startup Network, have signed a non-paper encouraging the European Commission to review public procurement rules for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to better support the "twin" digital and green transitions. The signatories want a revision of the EU public procurement rules to ensure that more innovative SMEs are eligible. According to the start-up organization the current rules define innovation too narrowly as Research & Development, which results in suboptimal distribution of projects and hinders the growth of innovative tech services that lack explicit R&D elements.

ENVIRONMENT

EU outlines Disaster Resilience Goals

The Commission has adopted new plans to increase disaster resilience across Europe in response to the growing risk of natural hazards. The plans aim to improve the EU's capacity to handle future significant disasters and emergencies by identifying five common goals: Anticipate, Prepare, Alert, Respond, and Secure. To achieve these goals, the European Commission is launching five flagship initiatives. These initiatives aim to improve risk assessment, increase public awareness, enhance early warning systems, improve response capacity, and secure a robust civil protection system.