

#TRENDY THURSDAY

EUROPEAN UNION

President Ursula von der Leyen and her next College of Commissioners

President von der Leyen announced the new College of Commissioners, outlining a streamlined structure focused on key priorities: prosperity, security, and democracy. The College will feature six Executive Vice-Presidents, each overseeing critical areas such as clean transition, tech-sovereignty, industrial strategy, and social rights, with a commitment to cross-departmental collaboration and gender balance—40% women among Commissioners. The new structure emphasizes an integrated approach to policy and a leaner, more interactive framework to enhance Europe's competitiveness and cohesion. The formal nomination process will follow the European Parliament's procedural rules.

AGRIFOOD

EU Parliament Rejects Pesticide Residue Tolerance for Imports, Demands Equal Standards

The European Parliament has rejected two Commission decisions allowing higher pesticide residue levels in imported foods for substances banned in the EU, such as cyproconazole, spirodiclofen, benomyl, carbendazim, and thiophanate-methyl. MEPs emphasized that imported products must meet the same safety standards as those produced within the EU to protect public health and ensure fair competition. With significant majorities voting against the Commission's proposals, Parliament has called for the Commission to withdraw these decisions and propose stricter residue limits for imports.

HEALTH

Commission Calls for Broader Smoke-Free Zones and Regulation of Emerging Nicotine Products

The European Commission has proposed stronger measures to enhance smoke-free environments by revising the Council Recommendation on this issue. New recommendations aim to expand smoke-free policies to include key outdoor areas: playgrounds, amusement parks and transport stops. Also aims to cover emerging products like heated tobacco and electronic cigarettes, which pose health risks. The initiative seeks to protect public health, particularly for children and young people, from second-hand smoke and aerosol exposure. The Commission will support these measures with €96 million in funding and a new prevention toolkit. These updates align with the goal of achieving a 'Tobacco-Free Generation' by 2040 and addressing the growing impact of emerging nicotine products.

HEALTH

EU Moves to Strengthen Health Emergency Collaboration with EFTA States

The European Commission recommends opening negotiations with Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway for new agreement on health emergencies concerning medical countermeasures. This follows a December 2023 joint statement by Vice-President Šefčovič and Commissioner Kyriakides, who highlighted the EFTA states' desire for closer cooperation with the EU on health preparedness and response. While current EEA agreements cover cross-border health threats, they lack specific provisions for emergency medical countermeasures. The new agreement aims to enhance collaboration and strengthen collective health capacities across Europe, reflecting the EU's commitment to solidarity and effective response to health crises.

COMPETITION

Draghi Advocates for Greater Integration to Boost European Competitiveness

Mario Draghi urged MEPs to choose between Europe's exit, paralysis, or deeper integration to enhance competitiveness. In his report, he stressed the need for Europe to close the innovation gap with the US and China, align decarbonization with competitiveness, and reduce dependency on foreign powers. Draghi proposed an annual funding of EUR 750-800 billion for joint projects, combining private and public investment, including potential common debt issuance. Many MEPs supported his call for urgent economic reforms, emphasizing competition, innovation, and increased investments in social, green, and digital sectors, while others debated on the balance between economic growth and environmental goals.

ENERGY

EU Opens Applications for Energy Projects to Shape Future Infrastructure

The European Commission has launched a call for applications for energy infrastructure projects under the Trans-European Network for Energy (TEN-E) Regulation, allowing them to achieve Project of Common Interest (PCI) or Project of Mutual Interest (PMI) status. Eligible projects include those in electricity, hydrogen, smart grids, CO2 transport, and electrolyser categories. Applications for electricity and hydrogen projects are open from September 18 to November 18, 2024, while other categories are open until December 18, 2024. Successful projects will be assessed and ranked, with the final Union list of PCIs and PMIs expected by early 2026.