

# #TRENDY THURSDAY

## EUROPEAN UNION

### Parliament Approves von der Leyen II Commission

The European Parliament approved Ursula von der Leyen's second College of Commissioners with 370 votes in favor, 282 against and 36 abstentions. The new Commission will formally take office on December 1, 2024, focusing on enhancing European competitiveness, security and decarbonization. Von der Leyen emphasized priorities like the European Green Deal, defense spending and innovation. MEPs debated key challenges, including global competition, energy independence and strengthening Europe's defense amid ongoing conflicts. The Commission's first initiative will address Europe's innovation gap with the US and China through a "competitiveness compass."

## EUROPEAN UNION

### Bulgaria and Romania Secure Full Schengen Membership

On November 22, 2024, Bulgaria and Romania took a major step toward full Schengen Area membership as their interior ministers, along with Austria, signed a declaration in Budapest. The countries have already been part of the Schengen Area by air and sea since March 2024, but the removal of land border checks has been the final hurdle. EU leaders, including President Ursula von der Leyen and Commissioner Ylva Johansson, welcomed the agreement, with full membership expected to take effect in January 2025. This decision will enhance the free movement of people and goods and is seen as a significant economic benefit for both countries.

## DIGITAL

### DSA: Enforcing Accountability for Online Platforms

Under the EU's Digital Services Act (DSA), the first 19 designated very large online platforms (VLOPs) and very large search engines (VLOSEs) must now publish annual risk assessment and audit reports. These reports, mandated since April 2023, analyze risks such as illegal content, disinformation, the protection of minors and detail mitigation measures taken. This initiative aims to enhance transparency and accountability in the tech industry, fostering safer online environments. The Commission plans workshops in early 2025, where stakeholders will discuss these assessments with service providers.

## ENERGY

### Nuclear Sector Pushes for Early Hydrogen Label

The nuclear industry is pushing for a decision on whether hydrogen derived from nuclear energy can be labelled as 'low-carbon' to be made sooner than the European Commission's proposed 2028 deadline. Industry leaders argue that advancing the decision to 2026 would help meet Europe's 2030 hydrogen production targets and provide much-needed clarity for investment in clean technologies. The Commission's draft rules, released in September 2024, have drawn criticism for delaying the recognition of nuclear-produced hydrogen, which could support the EU's net-zero goals and stimulate private financing for key projects.

## HEALTH

### EU Clinical Trial Rules Fall Short, Says Dutch Pharma

The Dutch Association of Innovative Medicines has expressed concerns that Europe's lack of harmonized clinical trial regulations is undermining its global competitiveness. While China's clinical trials have doubled since 2018, Europe's share of global commercial trials has decreased from 18% to 12%. The report highlights that the EU's regulatory and funding environments are less favourable, contributing to fewer trials in countries like the Netherlands, where the number of clinical studies dropped from 282 to 210 in five years. The association urges the EU to simplify and speed up clinical trial processes to maintain its attractiveness as a research hub.

## HEALTH

### Pharma Chief Urges EU to Prioritize Competitiveness

Roche's Pharma International head, Padraic Ward, calls for aligning EU pharmaceutical reform with its competitiveness agenda, emphasizing urgent action to reverse Europe's declining share in global R&D, projected to fall to 25% by 2030. He highlights concerns over fragmented investment, reduced clinical trials and inadequate incentives for innovation. Ward supports leveraging AI and implementing policies like the EU Health Data Space to boost competitiveness and foster innovation. Despite challenges, he underscores Europe's strengths, such as scientific talent and equitable health systems, urging governments to view healthcare innovation as an investment, not a cost.