

Agenda of the European Commission

31 March – 6 April 2014

**Background notes from the Spokespersons' service for journalists.
The European Commission reserves the right to make changes.**

Monday 31 March:

RegioStars 2014: Awards for innovative regional development

Tuesday 1 April:

More flexible visa rules to boost growth and job creation

Monday 31 March

RegioStars 2014: Awards for innovative regional development

The news:

On 31 March EU Commissioner for Regional Policy, Johannes Hahn, will present the 2014 RegioStars Awards to Europe's flagship projects of innovation. Together with the Jury chaired by former Committee of the Regions President, Luc Van den Brande, Commissioner Hahn will award the winning projects in four categories:

- Smart Growth – SME innovation
- Sustainable Growth – Green jobs and jobs through bio-economy
- Inclusive Growth – Creating jobs for the younger generation
- CityStar – Investment projects in sustainable urban public transport

This year's event comes at a crucial time as Europe's regions and cities are finalising their strategic investment plans, the so-called "Partnership Agreements" on how to spend the European Structural and Investment Funds over the next seven years. The Awards Ceremony will showcase the first projects that reflect the reform of Cohesion Policy.

The background:

In this 7th edition of RegioStars, the Jury singled out 19 finalists from 80 projects on the basis of four criteria: innovation, impact, sustainability and partnership. The finalists come from regions and cities in 17 Member States: Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

The aim of the awards is to recognise good practice in regional development and to highlight inspiring projects financed either by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) or the European Social Fund (ESF), which prove a model for other regions.

The event:

Commissioner for Regional Policy, Johannes Hahn, will present this year's RegioStars winners at a press conference on 31 March, from 15.00-16.00 at the Palais des Beaux-Arts, Rue Ravenstein, Brussels. Journalists will have the opportunity to do interviews with the RegioStars winners after the press conference.

The official award ceremony will take place at the same day, at 19.00 at the Palais des Beaux-Arts with Commissioner Johannes Hahn and the President of the RegioStars Jury, Luc Van den Brande. The ceremony is open to the media, but registration is necessary (see links below).

The sources:

- An IP will be available on Monday, 31 March
- Information on RegioStars Awards, media programme and registration:
 - [RegioStars 2014 Awards](#)
- Information on the finalists:
 - [RegioStars 2014 Finalists](#)
 - [Video footage and portraits of the winning projects](#) (available on 31 March)
 - Twitter: [@EU_Regional](#) [@JHahnEU](#) #RegioStars
- The award ceremony and press conference will be also be available on Ebs <http://ec.europa.eu/avservices>

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Tuesday 1 April:

More flexible visa rules to boost growth and job creation

The news:

Despite efforts in recent years, the amount of red tape and practical difficulties facing those who apply for an EU Schengen visa are substantial. Difficulties include long waiting times in some areas of the world, and complex requirements for supporting documents. On 19 March, the European Commission is putting forward a visa package introducing facilitations in the processing of Schengen visas: (1) Clearer and shorter deadlines and easier lodging of visa applications; (2) Easier issuing of multiple-entry visas; (3) A new type of visa allowing those who intend to travel around Europe to stay longer than 90 days in the Schengen area.

The proposed changes address the main problems faced by all categories of visa applicants, and ensure a better distinction between first-time travellers and well known travellers.

The background:

Since the entry into force of the Visa Code in 2010, it has facilitated legitimate travel and tackled irregular migration, by improving consular organisation and cooperation, strengthening procedural guarantees, and reinforcing equal treatment of visa applicants. However, more should be done to address the challenges faced by visa applicants and Member States' consulates.

In addition, a 2012 Commission Communication highlighted the need for the common visa policy to also address potential for generating economic growth.

A 2013 study on the economic impact of short stay visa facilitations on the tourism industry gives an idea of the economic benefit. The findings show that, by introducing various procedural facilitations, an increase in trips to the Schengen area of between 30 and 60 % could be expected.

The event:

- IP and MEMO will be available on the day;
- Press conference with Vice-President Tajani and Commissioner Malmström;
- There will be a technical briefing with experts from DG HOME.
- Available on EbS

The sources:

- Homepage of Cecilia Malmström, Commissioner for Home Affairs
http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/malmstrom/welcome/default_en.htm
- Homepage DG Home Affairs: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/index_en.htm

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