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Brussels Info Flash

13 November 2026

H/Advisors' Analysis

Commission proposes Digital Fairness Act to strengthen consumer protection and competition online

Brussels seeks to tackle manipulative digital practices, improve transparency and reinforce enforcement across the Single Market

The **European Commission** presented its **Digital Fairness Act** on **11 November**, proposing a major overhaul of EU consumer protection rules to address unfair practices in digital markets. Part of a broader **Consumer Package**, the initiative aims to ensure equivalent protection online and offline while simplifying compliance for businesses and strengthening fair competition across the Single Market.

The proposal targets **manipulative online design ('dark patterns')**, addictive features, misleading pricing and unfair personalised advertising, particularly affecting minors. It also introduces greater transparency for **influencer marketing**, clearer subscription conditions and simpler cancellation procedures. Alongside the Act, the Commission proposed revising the **Consumer Protection Cooperation Regulation**, granting Brussels stronger powers to investigate and sanction widespread cross-border infringements. The package is expected to save consumers up to **€13.7 billion annually**.

Politically, the initiative marks a further expansion of the EU's **digital regulatory framework**, complementing existing legislation while seeking to reduce fragmentation in consumer protection rules. It reflects Brussels' ambition to balance **consumer rights, business competitiveness and regulatory simplification**, with the proposals now moving to the **European Parliament and Council** for negotiation.

Highlights of the week

- **Digital regulation and competitiveness.** The Commission proposed the Digital Fairness Act, while EU leaders discussed AI sovereignty and competitiveness.
- **Banking and investment.** Council and Parliament agreed on the 2027 EU budget, while Parliament rejected key retail investment rules.
- **Defence and security.** The EU extended military assistance to Ukraine and advanced drone cooperation and critical infrastructure protection.
- **Energy, environment and climate.** EU institutions agreed to increase free ETS allowances for industry, while the Commission advanced clean-energy investment and climate action.

Main Issues in the EU

The Council

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- **Informal European Council.** EU leaders are meeting in Dublin to discuss artificial intelligence, focusing on European competitiveness, technological sovereignty, investment and infrastructure, alongside AI-related security and societal risks. They will also review developments in Ukraine and ongoing peace negotiations, reaffirming the EU's role in diplomatic efforts and its commitment to Ukraine's security.

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- **EU Emissions Trading System.** The Council and European Parliament reached a provisional agreement to increase free ETS allowances for energy-intensive industries between 2026 and 2030, providing approximately 121 million allowances to protect industrial competitiveness and reduce carbon leakage risks. The agreement covers sectors including chemicals, steel, ceramics and glass, with unused allowances redirected to the Modernisation and Innovation Funds.

- **European Political Community summit.** More than 40 European leaders met in Dublin to discuss continental security, resilience and cooperation, focusing on Ukraine and efforts towards a ceasefire and lasting peace. EU leaders reaffirmed their commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and continued financial and military assistance, with Ukraine's financing needs for 2027 to be discussed at the European Council on 26–27 November.

- **Fisheries and aquaculture.** The Council and European Parliament reached a provisional agreement on a modernised framework for fisheries and aquaculture statistics, consolidating five existing regulations into one. The new rules aim to improve data quality and comparability, reduce administrative burdens and establish a European Fisheries and Aquaculture Data Portal to support more effective policymaking.

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- **EU budget 2027.** The Council and European Parliament reached an agreement on the EU's 2027 annual budget, setting €199.7 billion in commitments and €211.5 billion in payments. The agreement prioritises EU programmes and investment while ensuring sufficient resources to address geopolitical challenges, including the crises in Ukraine and the Middle East, and respond to unforeseen circumstances.

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- **Military support for Ukraine.** The Council extended the mandate of the EU Military Assistance Mission in Ukraine (EUMAM) until November 2028, allocating nearly €300 million. The mission will establish a presence in Ukraine to strengthen coordination with

Ukrainian military authorities and adapt training to battlefield needs, building on the training of over 100,000 Ukrainian soldiers since 2022.

- **Humanitarian aid**. The Council adopted conclusions calling for stronger EU humanitarian diplomacy, more predictable funding and greater cooperation with local partners. It endorsed the objective of allocating at least 25% of EU humanitarian funding to local and national actors by 2027, while improving humanitarian supply chains and crisis response.

- **VAT and e-commerce.** The Council agreed on new rules to simplify VAT collection on online sales and align the system with the EU customs reform. The measures extend the Import One Stop Shop (IOSS) to goods of all values and require non-EU platforms to collect VAT directly from July 2028. The European Parliament will be consulted before formal adoption.

- **Eurogroup.** Eurozone finance ministers discussed inflation, fiscal developments and progress on the digital euro and Banking Union. Joined by NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, they also addressed defence financing, emphasising joint procurement, efficient use of public resources and sustained investment in European defence capabilities.

- **Tobacco taxation.** EU finance ministers failed to reach unanimous agreement on the revision of the Tobacco Excise Directive, despite broad support for the Irish Presidency's compromise. The proposal would harmonise minimum excise duties and extend the framework to e-cigarette liquids, nicotine pouches and heated tobacco. The Presidency will continue negotiations with the remaining opposing Member State.

- **Fiscal flexibility.** The Council approved Italy's activation of the national escape clause under EU fiscal rules, allowing greater flexibility for defence expenditure and energy security measures. The mechanism provides flexibility of up to 1.5% of GDP over four years, with energy-related measures capped at 0.6% of GDP between 2026 and 2028-

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- **Capital markets.** The Council formally approved its negotiating position on the Market Integration and Supervision Package (MISP), aimed at deepening EU capital markets and advancing the Savings and Investments Union. The decision paves the way for negotiations with the European Parliament on the final legislation.

The Commission

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- **Port infrastructure State aid.** The Commission approved €286 million in German State aid to support infrastructure improvements at the Port of Hamburg. The funding comprises two €143 million measures for projects at the Salzgitter and Steinwerder quays, supporting the development of port infrastructure.

- **Industrial investment and State aid.** The European Commission approved €960 million in Dutch State aid to strengthen Invest-NL, including a €900 million capital increase and continued funding for its development activities. The measures aim to address investment gaps in strategic sectors, including clean energy, biotechnology, artificial intelligence, water technology and industrial digitalisation.

- **Mediterranean energy and climate investment.** At COP31, the Commission presented new initiatives under the Pact for the Mediterranean to strengthen climate resilience and sustainable investment. Its flagship T-MED initiative aims to mobilise up to €25 billion by 2035 for clean energy and infrastructure projects, supported by an investment platform backed by up to €4.5 billion in EU guarantees.

- **Energy and climate targets.** The Commission published its assessment of Poland's updated National Energy and Climate Plan, finding improved ambition and alignment with EU renewable energy and energy efficiency targets for 2030. However, it called for further measures on carbon removals, building efficiency and fossil fuel subsidies, completing its assessment of all submitted national plans.

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- **EU–Israel relations.** The European Commission will examine a European Citizens' Initiative calling for the suspension of the EU–Israel Association Agreement, after collecting over 1.1 million validated signatures. The Commission must issue a formal response by 12 May 2027, outlining any action it intends to take.

- **Drone detection and security.** The Commission launched a call for expressions of interest to develop and test cellular-based drone detection technologies, involving telecommunications operators, infrastructure providers and Member States. The initiative aims to strengthen European counter-drone capabilities and protect critical infrastructure, with potential funding opportunities to follow.

- **Research and innovation.** The European Research Council awarded €500 million in Synergy Grants to 48 research teams under Horizon Europe. The funding will support 172 researchers working on scientific challenges, including quantum computing, sustainable infrastructure and advanced medical technologies.

- **Sustainability reporting.** The Commission launched a consultation on draft limited assurance standards under the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), following the simplifications introduced by Omnibus I. The initiative aims to ensure reliable sustainability disclosures while reducing administrative burdens, with feedback open until 18 January 2027.

- **Industrial State aid.** The Commission approved a €52 million Luxembourgish State aid scheme to provide temporary electricity price relief for energy-intensive industries.

Beneficiaries must reinvest at least 50% of the support in assets that reduce electricity system costs, supporting industrial competitiveness and decarbonisation.

- **Merger approvals.** The Commission approved the acquisition of joint control of Eclairion by Caisse des dépôts et consignations, Human Performance Capital and Davidson Kempner, finding no competition concerns in the data centre sector.

- **EU–Australia research cooperation.** The EU and Australia signed an agreement paving the way for Australia's association with Horizon Europe, enabling Australian organisations to participate in collaborative research projects covering health, climate, energy and digital technologies. Transitional arrangements will allow participation from January 2027.

- **Competition enforcement.** The Commission closed its preliminary antitrust investigation into Nederlandse Spoorwegen following the Dutch railway operator's adoption of a new policy for selling decommissioned trains. The policy introduces an open and transparent sales process intended to improve access to second-hand rolling stock for competing operators.

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- **Mediterranean security**. The European Commission launched two initiatives under the Pact for the Mediterranean: MED-OP, aimed at strengthening judicial and law enforcement cooperation against organised crime, and Secure Borders, focused on combating illicit trafficking. Both initiatives will also address cyber and hybrid threats and migration-related challenges.

- **EU–Nigeria migration cooperation.** The EU and Nigeria signed their first readmission agreement, establishing procedures for identifying and returning individuals without the legal right to stay. The agreement strengthens bilateral cooperation on migration and security and requires approval by the European Parliament and ratification by the Council before entering into force.

- **EU financing.** The Commission raised €8 billion through its tenth syndicated bond transaction of 2026, comprising two €4 billion tranches maturing in 2031 and 2046. The issuance contributes to the Commission's €80 billion funding target for the second half of 2026.

- **Commission appointments.** The Commission appointed Maria Tomassetti as Director for Horizontal Affairs in DG JUST and Barbara Jankovec as Director for Land Transport in DG MOVE, strengthening senior management in justice, consumer protection and transport policy.

- **Merger approvals.** The Commission approved Danfoss's acquisition of Alfa Gomma, Blackstone and Clearlake's acquisition of Discovery Education, and CVC DIF and Carlyle's acquisition of BauWatch, finding no competition concerns.

- **Digital Fairness Act.** The European Commission proposed new legislation to strengthen consumer protection online, targeting manipulative design practices, hidden fees, unfair personalised advertising and subscription traps. It also proposed stronger enforcement powers, allowing the Commission to investigate major cross-border infringements and impose fines of up to 6% of companies' global annual turnover.

- **Black Sea security.** Following President von der Leyen's visit to Romania and Bulgaria, the Commission announced €50 million to accelerate the establishment of the Black Sea Maritime Security Hub. The initiative aims to strengthen maritime surveillance, protect freedom of navigation and improve regional security amid increasing hybrid threats and attacks on commercial shipping.

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- **NextGenerationEU.** The European Commission positively assessed the final payment requests from Estonia (€190.6 million) and Luxembourg (€59 million) under the Recovery and Resilience Facility. Once approved and disbursed, both countries will have received their full allocations, completing investments and reforms in areas including energy, digitalisation and healthcare.

- **Mediterranean cooperation.** The Commission and the European External Action Service presented an updated Action Plan under the Pact for the Mediterranean, introducing nine new initiatives and bringing the total to 30. The plan aims to strengthen economic cooperation, connectivity, resilience and security between the EU and its Southern Mediterranean partners.

- **European Sport Model.** The Commission and UEFA signed their fourth Arrangement of Cooperation, reaffirming their commitment to the European Sport Model. The agreement promotes solidarity, inclusion and fair competition, while emphasising the importance of maintaining links between grassroots and professional football and balancing domestic and European competitions.

- **EU–Ukraine defence cooperation.** The Commission hosted the second meeting of the EU–Ukraine Drone Alliance, bringing together industry representatives to accelerate the development and production of drone and counter-drone systems. Discussions focused on industrial cooperation, supply chain resilience, innovation and the establishment of dedicated working groups.

- **Digital connectivity.** The Commission launched discussions on an Integrated EU Secure Connectivity Offer to strengthen digital infrastructure linking the EU, the Black Sea, the

South Caucasus and Central Asia. The initiative aims to mobilise European technology and investment, support secure connectivity and diversify strategic trade routes.

- **Digital Services Act.** The Commission launched a consultation on revised election guidelines under the DSA, addressing emerging risks linked to generative AI, disinformation and online manipulation. The updated guidance aims to strengthen safeguards for electoral processes and political candidates, with feedback open until 23 November 2026.

- **Renewable energy State aid.** The Commission approved a €2.04 billion Belgian State aid scheme to support the Princess Elisabeth offshore wind farm under the Clean Industrial Deal State Aid Framework. The measure, based on a two-way contract for difference, is expected to generate up to 2.6 TWh of renewable electricity annually.

- **Merger approvals.** The Commission approved the acquisition of Eco Eridania by Roccaforte and CVC in the waste management sector, and Volkswagen's acquisition of Europcar in the car rental sector, finding no competition concerns.

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- **EU climate action.** The European Commission published its 2026 Climate Action Progress Report and Carbon Market Report, showing that EU greenhouse gas emissions fell by 1.6% in 2025 and are now 39% below 1990 levels. EU ETS revenues increased by 11% to €43.2 billion, supporting further investment in decarbonisation.

- **Fertiliser industry.** The Commission launched the EU Fertilisers Value Chain Partnership, bringing together producers, farmers and Member States to address fertiliser affordability, supply security and import dependence. The initiative aims to strengthen domestic production, improve market predictability and support agricultural competitiveness.

- **Financial markets.** The Commission, ECB and ESMA launched a call for participants in the European Tokenisation Standards Group, aimed at developing common standards for digital financial assets and distributed ledger technologies. The initiative seeks to improve interoperability and reduce fragmentation across European financial markets.

- **Merger approvals.** The Commission approved the acquisition of Prime Data Centers by Snowhawk, Ares, Data Realty Group and Macquarie, and the acquisition of Technology & Strategy by Ardian, finding no competition concerns.

The European Parliament

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- **European Parliament Vice-President.** MEPs elected Tilly Metz (Greens/EFA, Luxembourg) as Parliament's new Vice-President, replacing Nicolae Ștefănuță

following his election as Co-Chair of the Greens/EFA group. Metz secured 423 votes in the first round and will serve as Parliament's eleventh Vice-President.

- **Proxy voting for MEPs**. Parliament approved amendments to the statute governing MEPs to allow proxy voting from three months before the expected date of childbirth until six months afterwards. The proposal, adopted by 578 votes to 25, requires further institutional approvals and implementing arrangements before becoming operational.

- **EU Civil Protection Mechanism.** Parliament adopted its negotiating position on the 2028–2034 Union Civil Protection Mechanism, proposing a €12.42 billion budget, exceeding the Commission's €10.68 billion proposal. MEPs called for 40% of funding to be allocated to civil protection, 40% to health emergencies and 20% to flexible response measures. The file was referred back to committee for negotiations with the Council.

- **Retail Investment Strategy**. Parliament rejected the provisional agreement with the Council on retail investor protection rules by 286 votes to 300, preventing the agreement from proceeding to adoption. However, MEPs approved the separate regulation modernising key information documents for retail investment products by 311 votes to 261, strengthening transparency on investment risks, costs and returns.

- **European Chemicals Agency.** Parliament approved the provisional agreement with the Council on new governance rules for the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), strengthening its institutional framework, resources and expert committees. The reform aims to improve chemical risk assessments and support the Agency's expanding regulatory responsibilities.

- **Geographical indications.** Parliament approved an agreement with the Council aligning EU geographical indication rules with amendments to the international Lisbon Agreement. The legislation seeks to ensure consistency between EU protection systems and international arrangements for geographical indications.

- **EU relations with Greenland.** Parliament adopted its opinion on the future framework for cooperation with Greenland and other overseas countries and territories under the 2028–2034 EU budget. MEPs called for stronger financial support, connectivity, resilience and sustainable economic development, while reinforcing cooperation with Greenland and respecting its sovereignty.

- **Europe's Beating Cancer Plan.** Parliament adopted a resolution assessing the implementation of Europe's Beating Cancer Plan, calling for at least €2.5 billion in dedicated cancer funding under the next EU budget. MEPs emphasised prevention, screening and equitable access to treatment, while advocating updated EU rules covering tobacco, e-cigarettes, heated tobacco products and nicotine pouches.

- **EU agri-food promotion policy.** Parliament adopted a resolution calling for ambitious funding for the promotion of EU agricultural and food products. MEPs expressed concern about proposed reductions in the 2027 budget and urged the Commission to maintain funding at least at its 2026 level, while simplifying access for SMEs and smaller producers.

- **Artificial intelligence governance.** Parliament adopted a resolution on the institutional implications of artificial intelligence, emphasising democratic oversight, fundamental rights and European technological sovereignty. MEPs called for stronger safeguards against AI-related manipulation and for human oversight of decision-making, while ensuring that the use of AI does not undermine institutional accountability.

- **Defence innovation**. Parliament adopted a resolution calling for greater support for defence start-ups and SMEs, particularly in accessing funding, testing facilities and public procurement opportunities. MEPs urged the EU to reduce administrative barriers and accelerate the development and deployment of innovative defence technologies to strengthen European defence readiness.

- **Deported Ukrainian children**. Parliament adopted a resolution calling for the immediate and unconditional return of Ukrainian children forcibly deported to Russia or transferred from occupied territories. MEPs urged stronger international cooperation and further sanctions against individuals and entities involved in these practices. The resolution was adopted by 536 votes to 8.

- **EU sanctions against Russia.** During a plenary debate, MEPs discussed strengthening sanctions against Russia and preventing their circumvention. Commissioner Maria Luís Albuquerque indicated that additional sanctions targeting oil refineries and the Russian shadow fleet were expected to be adopted on 16 November, while preparations continued for a broader 22nd sanctions package

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- **Commission Work Programme 2027.** Parliament debated the Commission's legislative priorities for 2027, focusing on competitiveness, industrial transformation, defence and security, sustainability and preparations for the next Multiannual Financial Framework. MEPs examined the Commission's proposed initiatives and outlined Parliament's priorities for the coming year.

- **Cybersecurity and critical infrastructure.** MEPs debated EU cyber resilience following cyberattacks affecting supermarket infrastructure across Europe. Discussions focused on protecting critical infrastructure and essential supply chains, strengthening preparedness against cyber and hybrid threats and improving cooperation between Member States and EU institutions.

- **Media freedom and rule of law.** Parliament debated concerns over media freedom and the rule of law in Czechia, focusing on the independence of public broadcasters and the importance of safeguarding editorial autonomy and media pluralis

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- **European Competitiveness Fund.** The Industry, Research and Energy Committee (ITRE) adopted its position on the 2028–2034 European Competitiveness Fund, proposing a €264.35 billion budget, compared with the Commission's €234.3 billion proposal. MEPs called for stronger funding for industrial transformation, defence innovation and strategic technologies, alongside clearer governance and funding safeguards. The committee also endorsed a negotiating mandate, pending plenary approval.

- **Horizon Europe.** ITRE adopted its position on the 2028–2034 Horizon Europe programme, proposing a €200 billion budget, €25 billion above the Commission's proposal. MEPs called for greater autonomy for the European Research Council and European Innovation Council, dedicated funding for research priorities and stronger links between research and industrial innovation.

- **Connecting Europe Facility.** The Transport (TRAN) and Industry (ITRE) Committees adopted their position on the 2028–2034 Connecting Europe Facility, calling for €91.28 billion in funding, compared with the Commission's €81.43 billion proposal. MEPs proposed dedicated allocations for transport, energy infrastructure and military mobility, with greater support for cross-border projects and stronger democratic oversight.

- **European Social Fund.** The Employment and Social Affairs Committee (EMPL) adopted its position on the European Social Fund+ for 2028–2034, advocating a dedicated €124.19 billion budget to support employment, skills development and social inclusion. MEPs called for the fund to retain its autonomy, with clear spending priorities and specific support for the European Child Guarantee.

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