

ESMA SELECTS NATASHA CAZENAVE AS CANDIDATE FOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR POSITION

The Board of Supervisors (Board) decision follows an open selection process, which it has today communicated to the European Parliament (Parliament). The Board will appoint the candidate as the new Executive Director following confirmation by the Parliament, with the confirmation process expected to take place in the coming weeks.

The candidate, once confirmed, will replace the current Executive Director, Verena Ross, who has now served the maximum term allowed under the ESMA Regulation and steps down on 29 May 2021. The incoming Executive Director will be appointed to serve a five-year term, renewable once.

Ms. Cazenave is currently Deputy Secretary General and Head of the Policy and International Affairs Directorate at the Autorité des Marchés Financiers (AMF).

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Press release – COVID-19 vaccines: MEPs to debate concerns about virus mutation



On Monday, Members of the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) Committee will question representatives from the [European Medicines Agency](#) (EMA), the [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control](#) (ECDC) and the [World Health Organisation](#) (WHO) on the efficacy of vaccines against mutations of the COVID-19 virus.

The invited experts are:

- Dr Marco Cavaleri, Head of biological health threats and vaccines strategy and Chair of the COVID-19 Emergency Task Force, EMA
- Dr Bruno Ciancio, Head of surveillance, ECDC
- Dr Katherine O'Brien, Department of Immunisation, Vaccines and Biologicals Director, WHO.

During the same meeting, Commission Deputy Director-General for Health Pierre Delsaux will present MEPs with the Commission's communication on the [HERA Incubator](#), a project designed to monitor variants, exchange data and cooperate on adapting vaccines.

When: Monday 15 March 2021, 13:30 – 15:45

Where: European Parliament in Brussels, room Paul Henri Spaak 1A002 and videoconference

You can watch the debate live [here](#).

Background

Parliament organised several debates in different committees as well as at plenary sessions on various aspects of the COVID-19 vaccination strategy. Most recently, [MEPs discussed ways to increase the roll-out of vaccines](#) with CEOs of pharmaceutical companies. The public health committee will evaluate the growing threat of COVID-19 variants and the EU plans to tackle this challenge.

Press release – Connecting Europe Facility: provisional deal on next generation programme



A provisional agreement between Parliament and Council reached on Thursday evening sets the framework for how the funds for the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) will be used from 2021 to 2027. The programme will fund transport, energy and digital projects, and ensure that essential Trans-European projects, such as Rail Baltica, alternative fuels charging infrastructure and the roll out of 5G coverage to important transport axes are finished on time by 2030.

With an overall budget of about €30 billion (in 2018 constant prices), CEF will fund projects to modernise transport infrastructure and cross-border projects with an EU added value. Around €10 billion allocated to cross-border transport projects will come from Cohesion Funds and will help EU countries complete missing transport links. A share of €1.4 billion will be designated to fast track the completion of major missing cross border railway projects, to be selected by the Commission on a competitiveness basis.

In the digital sector, CEF will support the development of projects of common interest on safe and secure very high capacity digital networks and 5G systems, as well as the digitalisation of transport and energy networks.

The programme will finally aim to make energy networks more interoperable and ensure that projects funded are in line with EU and national climate and energy plans.

Rapporteurs' quotes

Transport and Tourism rapporteur [Marian-Jean Marinescu](#) (EPP, RO) said: “I am happy that we ensured future funding to modernise and expand infrastructure projects in Europe. Modern and efficient connections will benefit all Europeans, contribute to more growth and create jobs across the EU. More investments will also help the transport sector to cope with the many challenges posed by decarbonisation that it will face in the near future”.

His colleague and co-rapporteur on the Transport and Tourism Committee, [Dominique Riquet](#) (Renew, FR) added: “This financing tool is needed more than ever. We need to develop further and faster transport projects to stimulate growth, be more competitive and strengthen cohesion across Europe. Achieving the Green Deal will not be possible if we do not upgrade our infrastructure for the digital and environmental transition. The CEF is a necessity for Europe to achieve those goals”.

Industry, Research and Energy rapporteur [Henna Virkkunen](#) (EPP, FI) stressed: “The programme finances key cross-border connectivity and renewable energy projects between member states, and will allow Europe to take a leap towards a digital and climate-neutral economy. This is vital to ensure we stay competitive in the future”.

Next steps

The informal deal on the Connecting Europe Facility programme still needs to be approved by the Council’s Committee of Permanent Representatives and Parliament’s Transport and Industry committees, and then the Council and Parliament as a whole.

[Hong Kong: Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the electoral system](#)



The National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China adopted today a Decision that will have a significant impact on democratic accountability and political pluralism in Hong Kong.

The Decision will lead to a concentration of power and influence in the Hong Kong Election Committee, which is not a democratically elected body. The Decision will lead to a reduction in the proportion of directly elected representatives in the Hong Kong Legislative Council. It also erodes the ability of Hongkongers to be legitimately represented and to directly influence the decisions it takes. These changes run counter to the commitments to greater democratic representation through universal suffrage as the ultimate aim for the selection of the Chief Executive and the election

of the Legislative Council as enshrined in article 45 and 68 of the Basic Law.

The European Union regrets that the fundamental freedoms, democratic principles and the political pluralism that are central to Hong Kong's identity and prosperity are under increasing pressure by the authorities. These freedoms were meant to be protected until at least 2047. They were agreed in the Sino-British Declaration registered by the Chinese and British governments at the United Nations and enshrined by the National People's Congress in the Hong Kong Basic Law.

Today's Decision is therefore yet another breach of the "One Country Two Systems" principle, and another violation of China's international commitments and the Hong Kong Basic Law.

The European Union calls on the Chinese and the Hong Kong authorities to restore confidence in Hong Kong's democratic process and to end the persecution of those who promote democratic values. At the Foreign Affairs Council on 22 February 2021, EU Foreign Ministers agreed to work on a set of short- and longer-term actions, in addition to the initial response package adopted in July 2020. In light of this most recent Decision, the European Union will consider taking additional steps and pay increased attention to the situation in Hong Kong as part of the overall relations between the European Union and China.

[Connecting Europe Facility: informal agreement with European Parliament on the post-2020 programme](#)

Today, negotiators from the Council and the European Parliament reached a **provisional agreement** on the second edition of the EU's flagship programme the **Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)**. CEF 2.0 will continue to **fund key projects in the areas of transport, digital and energy**. It will run from **2021 to 2027**, with a significant overall budget of **€33.71 billion** (in current prices).



We are very happy with the provisional deal reached today, as it is fully in line with the European Council conclusions of July last year. Having reached a deal with the Parliament today allows the first calls under the Connecting Europe Facility to be launched before the Summer break. Thanks to this programme, we have better

transport connections and energy networks, as well as better digital services and connectivity in Europe. And this substantial funding must and will continue. It is especially important for overcoming COVID-19-related challenges and tackling climate change.

Pedro Nuno Santos, Portuguese Minister for Infrastructure and Housing, President of the Council

The **budgets for each sector** will be (in current prices):

- transport: €25.81 billion (including €11.29 billion for cohesion countries)
- energy: €5.84 billion
- digital: €2.06 billion

In the field of **transport**, CEF 2.0 will promote interconnected and multimodal networks to develop and modernise railway, road, inland waterway and maritime infrastructure, as well as safe and secure mobility. Priority will be given to further development of the trans-European transport networks (TEN-T), focusing on missing links and cross-border projects with an EU added value. €1.56 billion of the transport budget will finance major rail projects between cohesion countries.

CEF 2.0 will also ensure that when infrastructure is adapted to improve **military mobility** within the EU, it is dual-use compatible, meeting both civilian and military needs. Military mobility will have a separate budget within the transport envelope, of €1.69 billion.

In the **energy** sector, the programme aims to contribute to further integration of the European energy market, improving the interoperability of energy networks across borders and sectors, facilitating decarbonisation, and ensuring security of supply. Funding will also be available for cross-border projects in the field of renewable energy generation. When defining award criteria, consistency with EU and national energy and climate plans, including the principle of 'energy efficiency first', will be taken into account.

In the area of **digital** connectivity, the scope of the programme has been broadened to reflect the fact that the digital transformation of the economy and society at large depends on universal access to reliable and affordable high and very high capacity networks. Digital connectivity is also a decisive factor in closing economic, social and territorial divides. To qualify for support from CEF 2.0, a project will have to contribute to the digital single market and EU connectivity targets. Priority will be given to projects which generate additional area coverage, including for households.

CEF 2.0 emphasises **synergies** between the transport, energy and digital sectors, to enhance the effectiveness of EU action and minimise implementation costs. It will promote cross-sectoral work in areas such as connected and automated mobility and alternative fuels.

The programme also aims to mainstream **climate action**, taking into account the

EU's long-term decarbonisation commitments such as the Paris Agreement.

Next steps

The provisional agreement reached today is **subject to approval by the Council**. It will now be submitted to the Council's Permanent Representatives Committee (Coreper) for endorsement.

Once adopted by both the Council and the European Parliament, the CEF regulation will enter into force the day after its publication in the EU Official Journal. It will apply retroactively from 1 January 2021.