

European Green Deal: EIB and City of Vienna sign climate partnership



- **First EU climate bank agreement with a large EU city**
- **EIB Vice-President McDowell: signal for other cities in Europe**
- **City Councillor Peter Hanke: Vienna as a “climate model city” pioneer in Europe**

The European Investment Bank (EIB) and the City of Vienna are seeking to deepen their partnership to combat climate change. They signed a “Joint Declaration on Climate Partnership” in Vienna, under which future City of Vienna projects concerning housing, energy, waste and transport will be subject to advance analysis for possible EU climate bank financing, taking their climate action contribution into account. This is the EU climate bank’s first partnership with a large EU city. Last autumn, the EIB decided to align all financing activities with the goals of the Paris climate agreement. The EU bank plays a crucial role in the “Green Deal” presented by the new European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen.

The EIB and the City of Vienna have already implemented several climate action projects, totalling over EUR 1bn, most of which were related to energy efficiency measures in municipal housing. The City has been pursuing an active climate action policy for over two decades with its “KLiP” climate action programme.

EIB Vice-President responsible for energy policy Andrew McDowell made the following comment on the signing: “The EIB – the EU climate bank – intends to redouble its efforts to combat climate change. Over the next ten years, we plan to kick-start climate action projects worth EUR 1tn. We will also bring all of the Bank’s financing activities into line with the Paris climate agreement by the end of 2020. Against this backdrop, I very much welcome this first climate partnership with the City of Vienna, indeed with any city in the EU, as it is only by working closely with ambitious partners that we can overcome the huge challenge of climate change. This partnership is also a signal for other cities in Europe.”

Vienna Councillor for Finance Peter Hanke sees the partnership with the EIB as a key element of the City’s manifold efforts to expand climate action: “In Vienna, we have set ourselves ambitious climate action objectives. We have also fully focused the City’s finances on climate action with the introduction of the Vienna climate budget and the *Klima-Milliarde* (“climate billion”) in the 2020 budget. This partnership with the European Investment Bank will enable us to implement further major climate action and adaptation projects in the future,” he said during the signing ceremony at Vienna City Hall.

Many important investment projects have already been implemented with EIB financing. These include the “Energy optimisation sludge treatment” project for Vienna’s main wastewater treatment plant as well as comprehensive thermal renovation of municipal housing with Wiener Wohnen. In the future, the City of Vienna and the EIB will concentrate on the most climate-relevant areas such as housing, energy, waste management and transport.

Climate action in Vienna

The City of Vienna has been implementing ambitious climate action initiatives since 1999, already managing to cut per capita greenhouse gas emissions in the city by a total of 34% between 1990 and 2018. The new “Smart City Vienna” framework strategy has set the city further ambitious climate goals for the future. Local per capita greenhouse gas emissions are expected to fall by 50% by 2030 and 85% by 2050.

In 2018, Vienna joined the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy, an EU initiative set up by the European Commission. It aims to go further than the EU’s energy policy targets related to reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 40% by 2030. Nearly 8 000 authorities have joined so far, including the metropolitan areas of Paris, London and Berlin. These cities share the vision of cutting carbon emissions (decarbonisation) and ensuring residents have access to safe, sustainable and affordable energy.

[Press release – Brexit: the Withdrawal Agreement passes the first European Parliament test](#)



After parliamentary ratification in the UK was concluded earlier today, with Royal Assent granted for the European Union (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill, [Constitutional Affairs Committee](#) MEPs voted in favour of a positive recommendation regarding the EU-UK Withdrawal Agreement, with 23 votes for, three against and no abstentions.

The vote took place after a statement by Committee Chair [Antonio Tajani](#) (EPP, IT) and a discussion between the Parliament's Brexit coordinator [Guy Verhofstadt](#) (Renew Europe, BE) and political group coordinators.

The debate in the Committee focussed on Parliament's contribution to [protecting citizens' rights](#) in the context of Brexit (with the majority of speakers during the first round commending the EU's negotiating team), as well as the [steps that should be taken by the UK and EU27 governments](#) to continue protecting these rights during the transition period and beyond. The discussion also addressed the overall impact of Brexit and the future relationship between the EU and the UK, which is going to be the objective of the future negotiations.

You can watch the debate on [EP Live](#). Click on the links below for specific

parts of the meeting.

[Opening statement](#) by Chair Antonio Tajani

[Statement](#) by the rapporteur Guy Verhofstadt

[Statements](#) by the shadow rapporteurs

[Interventions](#) by MEPs on behalf of political groups

[Recording](#) of the vote

Statements by MEPs after the vote: [part one](#) and [part two](#)

Next steps

The UK's withdrawal from the EU is set for midnight CET on 31 January 2020, with Parliament scheduled to vote on the Agreement next Wednesday, 29 January. To enter into force, any withdrawal agreement between the EU and the UK needs to be approved by the European Parliament by a simple majority of votes cast ([Article 50 \(2\) of the Treaty on European Union](#)). The Council will then conclude the process on the EU side by a qualified majority vote, foreseen for 30 January.

EU – League of Arab States relations: joint communiqué of the EU Political and Security Committee and the League of Arab States Permanent Representatives

The Chair and the Members of the EU Political and Security Committee and the Permanent Representatives to the League of Arab States held their eight meeting on the 23 January 2020 in Brussels.

The Ambassadors held constructive discussions on topics of mutual interest with a particular focus on the Question of Palestine and building a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, on developments of the situations in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Lebanon, and Iran, as well as on counter-terrorism issues and its funding, migration issues, refugees and displaced persons. Acknowledging the importance of joining efforts to address common and current political, economic, social, and security challenges which threaten the stability, prosperity and well-being of their common region and the world at large. They reaffirmed the strengthening of the European-Arab partnership as

an appropriate regional response and their commitment to effective multilateralism and to an international system based on respect for international law. In this light, they commended the holding of the fifth Joint Ministerial Meeting on 4 February 2019 in Brussels, and the results of the first Arab-European Summit that took place on 24 and 25 February 2019 in Sharm El-Sheikh.

The Ambassadors affirmed the continuation of strengthening cooperation in the framework of the Strategic Dialogue between the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States and the European External Action Service since its launching in November 2015, particularly in the fields of conflict prevention, early warning and crisis management, migration, nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction and arms control.

Preceding the EU-LAS Political Dialogue, on 22 January, the Ambassadors also held the first Joint Retreat which provided an excellent opportunity for an informal exchange of views on the timely issue of climate change and security. The working group sessions on enhancing cooperation between the League of Arab States and the European Union were also convened on the margins of the meeting.

Conscious of the opportunities and the challenges facing Euro-Arab relations, the Chair and the Members of the Political and Security Committee and the Permanent Representatives to the League of Arab States expressed their determination to keep strengthening their cooperation and coordination, and to work together for a safer and better future for all.

Green future: Europe has to show the way and lead by example



The fight against climate change was high on the agenda of the January plenary session of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), which hosted a debate on COP25 and the European Green Deal.

Urgent measures need to be taken to make climate protection and sustainable development happen, and the European Union must take the lead. At the debate held in Brussels on 23 January 2020, EESC president **Luca Jahier** was sharp in his words: *We are at a critical time. Unfortunately, the world is not on track to achieve the objectives of the Paris Agreement on climate change and SDG targets and this could have devastating implications for all of us*, he said.

The EESC president added that the transition to a sustainable, carbon-neutral and resource-efficient economy required fundamental changes in our society and in our economy, underlining that the EU had to deliver on two levels, on one side implementing the 2030 Agenda itself and on the other promoting it in the world. *As the EESC, we are convinced that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda must be the EU's top priority for the next decade. Europe must be the frontrunner, the global leader on climate!* he continued.

Mr Jahier deplored the lack of political will of the countries present at Madrid's COP25 to step up their climate efforts, which led to a mediocre outcome at the international climate summit. However, he praised European Commission president **Ursula von der Leyen's** Communication on the European Green Deal and its strong commitment on climate neutrality by 2050.

In this respect, **Virginijus Sinkevičius**, commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, pointed out that the Green Deal was not only a way of tackling climate change problem, but also an ambition to ensure economic growth and social justice. *It is about people and society, it is the Green Deal which leaves nobody behind* he declared, stressing that the Biodiversity Strategy, the Circular Economy Action Plan and the other systematic solutions to deliver climate change aims would cater for both people and planet, pulling together all sectors and actors.

Commissioner Sinkevičius also warned that it was crucial that the green transition ideas did not stay in Brussels but that they became a reality on the ground in the Member States as soon as possible, assuring that the SDGs were a priority for the Commission and would always be the backdrop to its work.

According to the EESC president, by adopting the Green Deal as its first political initiative, the new Commission showed leadership and determination to promote ambitious climate and environment policies inside the EU and across the world. *I welcome the new narrative of the Commission, which proposes a new growth strategy – a growth that gives more back than it takes away. As I often say, delivering on the SDGs is the way forward because it is a win-win agenda for everyone: employers, trade unions, citizens – and for our planet*, he stated.

During the debate, **Peter Schmidt**, president of the EESC Sustainable Development Observatory (SDO), maintained that the Green Deal was not only about climate and strongly called for a commitment that was green and at the same time social.

Ovais Sarmad, from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), mentioned that it was essential to deal with the climate crisis very urgently at an unprecedented level, while remaining as robust and ambitious as possible.

Enrico Giovannini, representing the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS), was happy to note that the 2030 Agenda had at last been placed at the real heart of the Commission's sustainable development strategy.

Finally, **Semia Cherif**, from the network of Mediterranean Experts on Climate and Environmental Change (MedECC), advocated for a long-term vision and approach based on an awareness of pollution even when it was not immediately visible, as in the case of tiny emerging pollutants.

Mr Jahier concluded by highlighting the importance for the EU institutions of joining forces in order to deliver the European Green Deal agenda in a timely manner. This would not be enough though, without a coordinated and consistent effort and support from all civil society actors.

For information on the work and activities carried out by the EESC Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment ([NAT](#)) section and the Sustainable Development Observatory ([SDO](#)), please consult our website.

[Press release – Croatian Presidency outlines priorities to EP committees](#)



Croatia holds the Presidency of the Council until July 2020. The first series of hearings took place on 20, 21 and 22 January. A second set of hearings is taking place in the following week. This press release will be updated regularly.

Hearings held on 20, 21 and 22 January

Environment and Public Health

On Monday, Health Minister Milan Kujundžić told the Environment and Public Health Committee that organ donation and transplantation, ageing and cancer are among the priorities. MEPs quizzed the Minister on a variety of issues, including food labelled according to nutrients, obesity, endocrine disruptors, euthanasia and medicine shortages. On Tuesday, Environment and Energy Minister Tomislav Čorić said that priorities include the transition to climate neutrality by 2050 and protecting biodiversity. Emission reduction goals for 2030 and the climate law, funding, air and water quality and aviation emission reductions were some of the issues raised by MEPs.

Finally, still on Tuesday, Agriculture Minister Marija Vučković stressed agriculture's role in preserving the environment as well as issues such as food safety, plant health, pesticide reductions and animal welfare. MEPs questioned the Minister on subjects such as the CAP reform, forestry practices, animal feed and sustainable food systems.

Fisheries

On Tuesday, Agriculture Minister Marija Vučković told the Fisheries Committee

that the link between stable fish stocks and sustainable fisheries would guide the Presidency's approach. She confirmed they would focus on advancing the negotiations on the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF). The Presidency will also aim to reach a general approach on fisheries control. Other issues on the agenda include aquaculture and scientific research, as well as post-Brexit preparations to ensure fair access to waters for both the EU and the UK.

International Trade

In the Trade Committee on Tuesday, MEPs asked Foreign and European Affairs Minister Gordan Grlić-Radman how the presidency plans to tackle the growing discord over the future conclusion of a free trade agreement between the EU and the Mercosur countries. They also wanted to know about the timely issue of WTO reform and how to include enforceable Green Deal principles in trade policy. Finally, they called for bilateral trade relations with Taiwan to be established, a trade strand to be added to the Africa policy, and for labour dignity to be ensured with trade partners.

Transport and tourism

The Presidency will start a debate on boosting the competitiveness and sustainability of the shipping sector and work on the Trans-European Transport Network and Connecting Europe Facility, State Secretary of the Ministry of Sea, Transport and Infrastructure Josep Bilaver told the Transport and Tourism Committee on Tuesday. On land transport, rail passenger rights will be one of the priorities as well as the Eurovignette proposal. On tourism, the Presidency will advocate for sustainable tourism and encourage the development of less developed regions and use of ICT, said State Secretary of the Ministry of Tourism Frano Matušić.

MEPs urged the Presidency to restart the discussions on air passenger rights and the Single European Sky. Some also wondered how to ensure that boosting the air transport sector will not lead to an increase in emissions. MEPs repeated calls to increase support for the tourism sector in the next EU long-term budget.

Foreign Affairs

Foreign Minister Gordan Grlić Radman said on Tuesday that they will do their best to advance enlargement as a way to invest in the stability and prosperity of Europe. Pointing to the Western Balkans, he told MEPs that the EU should not allow any European region to drift away. Croatia also intends to work on bringing the Eastern European partners closer and finding a comprehensive solution to the crisis in Ukraine, he said.

Regarding instability in southern neighbourhood and Middle East, he stressed it is important to combine efforts with international partners and engage on de-escalating tensions, adding that emphasis should be placed on addressing migration and countering terrorism.

Regional Development

On Tuesday, Regional Development and EU Funds Minister Marko Pavić said that the three main files currently under inter-institutional negotiations (Common Provisions Regulation, European Regional Development Fund/Cohesion Fund, and Interreg) will be their priority, and that he was confident in their timely adoption. The presidency also started to examine the proposal for the Just Transition Fund and progress is expected shortly.

Regional Development Committee members urged the Presidency to ensure that their updated budgetary proposals do not sacrifice cohesion funding and that swift progress is made on all matters.

Culture, education, youth and sport

In the field of education, Science and Education Minister Blaženka Divjak on Tuesday told the Culture and Education Committee that the Presidency will focus on: more investments to enhance the role of education in the European semester; a balanced mobility and brain circulation; better professional training for teachers, and a new post-2020 strategic framework for education and training. Youth in rural and remote areas will also be a priority, Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy Minister Vesna Bedeković added.

Deputy State Secretary for Sport Krešimir Šamija said that developing human potential in the field of sports, through new professional skills and competences for trainers and coaches, will be the priority. Supporting mobility in the cultural and creative sectors is also among their main objectives, Culture Minister Nina Obuljen Koržinek said, on Tuesday.

Internal market and consumer protection

Measures to support digitalisation, eliminate unjustified barriers in the single market and ensure consumer protection were among the issues discussed with Economy, Entrepreneurship and Crafts Minister Darko Horvat, in the Internal Market and Consumer Protection Committee on Wednesday.

MEPs asked the Presidency to be “ambitious” in tackling dual quality of products, advance its work on the free movement of services and ensure a better implementation of single market rules. Plans on artificial intelligence (AI) and on the circular economy, e.g. to prolong the shelf life of products, were also addressed. “The EU has all it takes to become a leader on artificial intelligence, on its own way and based on its own values”, said the Minister.

Agriculture and Rural Development

The Presidency will move towards an “ambitious budget” in which the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) “remains a priority” Farm Minister Marija Vučković told Agriculture Committee on Wednesday. The Presidency will push for the CAP to be simplified even further and reformed in a more sustainable way. It will also focus on the ‘Farm to fork’ strategy and new EU forest strategy for after 2020.

Ensuring that enough funds are available for EU farmers is imperative, MEPs said, many of them stressing that farmers should also be reimbursed for new

climate-related measures. Some speakers stressed that EU food security should remain the prime focus of the CAP, whilst others spoke against its re-nationalisation or demanded more ambitious climate actions.

Economic and Monetary Affairs

ECOFIN Chair Zdravko Marić at the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee on Wednesday flagged the review of the economic governance rules, completing the banking union, making progress on setting up a capital markets union and finalising the Council's position on the reform and investment support programme as the Presidency's main objectives. He also mentioned taxation, non-performing loans, and mitigating negative fiscal consequences from current demographic trends as other areas of work.

Various MEPs asked questions on the economic governance framework, the budgetary instrument envisaged to help member states carry out structural reforms, financial supervision architecture and bank resolution. They also sought for more detail on taxation and anti-money laundering.

Women's Rights and Gender Equality

On Wednesday, Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy Minister Vesna Bedeković, told Women's Rights and Gender Equality MEPs that the main priority in terms of gender equality is to identify the obstacles women face on the labour market and increase their rate of activity. "Stronger economic independence for women is key for economic growth", she said. The Minister also declared she would work to reduce the gender pay and pension gaps.

MEPs quizzed the Minister on a number of additional issues such as the attacks on sexual and reproductive rights in some EU countries, the ratification of the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women (only 21 EU countries have ratified it) and the Women on boards Directive, which is blocked in the Council.

Employment and Social Affairs

Labour and Pension System Minister Josip Aladrović and Social Policy Minister Vesna Bedeković outlined on Wednesday to the Employment and Social Affairs Committee their priorities for the next six months. These include delivering on the European Pillar of Social Rights as well as promoting work-life balance, gender equality and increased participation of women in the labour market. The implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) will be also high on the agenda.

MEPs quizzed the ministers on youth unemployment and the future of the youth guarantee, and the role of social partners in setting up an EU minimum wage. They expressed concerns about the funding of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the future Child Guarantee, announced for 2021. Several MEPs finally quizzed the ministers on the negotiations on the future EU long-term budget, opposing possible transfers from cohesion funds to the Just Transition Fund.

Budgets

Budgets Committee MEPs made clear to Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance Zdravko Marić that their most pressing issue is getting an agreement on the next EU long-term budget (multiannual financial framework, or MFF), still under discussion in the Council, while Parliament has been ready to negotiate since 2018. They reminded the Minister of the EP's position and reiterated that they insist on a reform of the EU's Own Resources (revenue).

Mr Marić replied that the Croatian Presidency's role regarding the MFF is limited, since EUCO President Charles Michel is now in the lead. Other issues discussed were the annual EU budget for 2021 – Council will present its guidelines in spring –, and the InvestEU and Reform Support Programmes.

Industry, Research, Energy

Environment and Energy Minister Tomislav Čorić told the Industry, Research and Energy Committee on Wednesday that the Presidency will support policies that strengthen infrastructure and connectivity, in particular through the Energy Union, and seek further integration in the energy market, boosting energy security through infrastructure and diversification. State Secretary and Sea, Transport and Infrastructure Minister Josip Bilaver pledged to start a discussion on artificial intelligence and 5G, with a focus on security.

Economy, Entrepreneurship and Crafts Minister Darko Horvat said that a long-term industrial policy strategy and strengthening the competitiveness of SMEs will be prioritised. On artificial intelligence, he highlighted that batteries need to be produced in a competitive and sustainable way in Europe. Finally, Science and Education Minister Blaženka Divjak said that they would seek to facilitate 'brain' circulation in the EU, as countries with less research and development are experiencing a brain drain.

Hearings held on 27 and 28 January

Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

Interior Minister Davor Božinović on Monday said the Presidency would support the Commission once new proposals on asylum and migration policy are tabled. Many MEPs of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs asked the Minister about alleged violence and pushbacks by Croatian police against asylum-seekers and migrants at the Croatian border with Bosnia. Mr Božinović defended the modus operandi of the Croatian police and insisted they always respect national and European law.

Justice Minister Dražen Bošnjaković told the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs that finishing work on the electronic evidence regulation is one of the Presidency's priorities, emphasising how crucial this instrument is for cross-border cooperation in criminal proceedings. Furthermore, Mr Bošnjaković highlighted the importance of a cross-border judicial training network. In the following debate, several MEPs asked Minister Bošnjaković to clarify how the Presidency aims to proceed regarding the Article 7 procedures against Hungary and Poland.

Legal Affairs

The Presidency will draft the future strategic guidelines on freedom, security and justice based on four key elements: values and rule of law, mutual trust, protection of the common European area and new technologies, Justice Minister Dražen Bošnjaković told the Legal Affairs Committee on Tuesday. In the field of civil law, the Presidency aims to reach an agreement on regulations on the service of documents and taking of evidence. Combatting all forms of violence against women, developing the e-Justice system, using modern technologies and Artificial Intelligence in the judiciary are also high on the agenda.

MEPs quizzed Mr. Bošnjaković on the future of several blocked files in the Council, e.g. comitology, gender balance on boards, country-by-country reporting by multinationals, the funding of EU long-term budget programmes and the EU mechanism on rule of law.