

## Article – In Parliament this week: Brexit, Nato and Vietnam



On Thursday the [constitutional affairs committee](#) will vote on its recommendation to Parliament on whether it should approve the EU-UK withdrawal agreement. The final vote by all MEPs during a plenary scheduled is currently scheduled for 29 January and will take place if the UK has fully ratified the agreement by then.

The EU-Vietnam free trade and investment protection agreements are up for a vote by the [international trade committee](#) on Tuesday. If approved, the deal would remove all export tariffs from the EU, open the Vietnamese public procurement market to EU firms and protect 196 EU products with geographical

indication.

The [internal market and consumer protection committee](#) votes on Thursday on a resolution addressing the challenges arising from the development of artificial intelligence technology, in particular in relation to consumer choice, the use of bias data and the need for EU liability rules to also cover new artificial intelligence-enabled products.

Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg will address the [foreign affairs committee](#), the [security and defence subcommittee](#) and the parliamentary delegation to Nato on Tuesday. Last week, the Parliament adopted resolutions on the state of play of the EU's common policies for security, defence and foreign affairs and called for closer cooperation with Nato while at the same time stressing the need for the EU to have strategic autonomy.

On the same day, the [budgets committee](#) will ask budget commissioner Johannes Hahn about the European Commission's priorities under the next long-term budget and the way it intends to cooperate with the Parliament.

The [environment and public health committee](#) will decide Tuesday whether to call for immediate action against illegal trade in pets.

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## [Spain: EIB and BBVA provide EUR 600m to support SMEs](#)



- **EIB is providing BBVA with a EUR 300m guarantee to expand its SME financing capacity**
- **Part of this EU bank guarantee – EUR 150m – is being granted with Investment Plan for Europe support**

The European Investment Bank (EIB) and BBVA are joining forces to provide financing on favourable terms for Spanish SMEs and mid-caps. EU bank Vice-President Emma Navarro and BBVA CEO Onur Genç signed an agreement today in Madrid enabling the Spanish bank to provide EUR 600m to support the investments of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). With this agreement, BBVA will be able to offer them favourable financing in terms of both maturity and interest rates.

To this end, the EIB has granted a EUR 300m guarantee to BBVA via a risk-sharing (portfolio guarantee) operation, an innovative agreement making it possible to spread the risks between the two institutions. Under this guarantee, the EIB will invest in a loan portfolio held by BBVA, enabling the Spanish bank to expand its financing capacity and provide SMEs with EUR 600m in new financing. This is the first risk-sharing operation to be signed by the EIB and BBVA.

The EIB is granting EUR 150m of this guarantee under the [Investment Plan for Europe](#), the support of which enables the EU bank to finance riskier projects. In concrete terms, these funds will help finance especially vulnerable SMEs such as micro-enterprises and entrepreneurs.

The EUR 600m in financing to be provided by BBVA under this agreement will be of particular benefit to small companies operating in regions with high levels of unemployment, and will support investments focused on innovation

and the development of projects promoting climate action. Some 1 700 companies with a total of almost 9 000 employees will be able to benefit from this agreement.

During the signing ceremony in Madrid, **EIB Vice-President Emma Navarro, who is responsible for the Bank's operations in Spain**, said: *"We are delighted to join forces with BBVA to give Spanish SMEs access to additional resources on favourable terms enabling them to grow and become more competitive. Supporting them continues to be one of the EIB Group's main priorities for contributing to economic growth and job creation. To this end, in recent years we have dedicated over 50% of the EU bank's total financing in Spain to them."*

**Valdis Dombrovskis, European Commission Vice-President for an Economy that works for people** said: *"As of today, 1 700 businesses in Spain can benefit from loans under preferential conditions from BBVA thanks to EU backing. Those businesses employ some 9 000 people currently, and this new financing will enable the companies to grow even further. The Commission will continue to develop the growth finance market for European SMEs, which account for 85% of new jobs created in the past five years."*

**BBVA CEO Onur Genç** added: *"BBVA is committed to promoting the growth of Spanish SMEs and providing them with sustainable financial solutions. The SME sector creates wealth and jobs, and plays a key role in combating climate change."*

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## [Statement by the President of the European Council Charles Michel at the Berlin Conference](#)

I would like to thank Chancellor Merkel, and the organisers of today's conference, for your tireless work at this critical moment in the Libyan crisis.

It is encouraging to see the most influential regional and international partners come together in support of the UN-led efforts to find a political solution to the Libyan crisis.

As the EU has consistently stated, the only sustainable solution is through UN mediation efforts that put the needs of all Libyan people to the forefront.

I wish to reaffirm today the commitment of the European Union to the immediate cessation of hostilities in Libya in the interest of stability in its immediate neighborhood. We support the unity, sovereignty and territorial

integrity of Libya, and this in the interest of regional stability and prosperity – this is vital for Europe.

We have supported German-led mediation efforts launched last year in support of the UN peace process. I would like to pay special tribute to UN Special Representative Salame, who, under the authority of Secretary General Guterres, has made every effort to bring the parties to the negotiations table in order to find a political solution to the conflict.

We would like to encourage cooperation with the African Union and the League of Arab States.

In recent weeks, High Representative Borrell and I have worked to support the conclusion of a ceasefire and for the relaunch of the peace process.

We are committed to play an important role in the follow-up to the Berlin Conference. We represent Libya's main economic partner and primary investor. Libyan youths look to Europe when they study abroad. Libya's long term prosperity depends on these economic and cultural ties.

That is why the EU is gearing up to implement the outcome of the Berlin Conference. We are ready to mobilise our means where they are most needed.

In the short term, our contribution to the follow-up to this Conference, we are reflecting on how best to contribute to the monitoring of the ceasefire and the respect of the arms embargo. On the arms embargo, the EU was the only regional organisation to enforce it after 2016. We intend to continue that effort, working with our partners around this table, to cover all the corridors where the embargo is being violated.

In the longer term, as conditions allow, we hope to make progress in other areas of the proposed Conclusions:

1. political – to support a future national conference, the organisation of elections, and possible work on the constitution;
2. economic – actions focused on capacity building in national institutions, such as the National Oil Company, Central Bank and Libyan Investment Authority;
3. security sector reform (through our Common Security and Defence Policy instruments, including the existing civilian mission EUBAM);
4. and human rights – the EU wishes to bring its expertise.

The EU is ready to host a Senior Officials Meeting of the International Follow-up Committee tasked with implementing the Conference Conclusions. And we are ready to play an active role in the technical working groups created by this process.

Now it is time for all members of the international community to work together to consolidate the ceasefire and respect the UN arms embargo and also preserve the unity of Libya's financial institutions on which the unity of the country itself depends.

In the past, we have shown unity on a number of these objectives. For

example, thwarting illegal attempts to purchase oil outside the official circuit. In other areas, we should have done better, in particular, on the arms embargo, as highlighted by the UN in its reports.

Moving forward, we should also avoid unilateral actions, such as the signing of agreements, which exacerbate the conflict. I am aiming at the actions that are incompatible with international law and which create a pretext for external interference in the Libyan conflict. The European Union has taken an unambiguous position on this, with the conclusions of the European Council on 12 December 2019.

Today we are committed to the Berlin process and the UN mediation efforts that put the needs of the Libyan people first. Today is an important step, but much work remains to be done. We are ready to contribute.

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## **Speech by President Charles Michel after his meeting with the Federal Chancellor of Austria Sebastian Kurz**

Grüß Gott Sebastian,

I would like to start by thanking you for the invitation to spend this evening with you. We had a very extensive meeting covering the various European issues that most concern us.

I should like to take my turn in congratulating you on the good election result and the subsequent negotiation leading to the government agreement. That agreement expresses Austria's commitment to play an active role in supporting the European project. I'm delighted about that, as we have already enjoyed good cooperation when we were both prime ministers. We know each other and know we'll be able to work together to make progress on a number of priority issues that mean a lot to us.

Firstly, I share your ambition to work on growing the economy and creating more jobs and more economic activity. That's a precondition for making progress, too, on social conditions and policies. I believe that Europe has a role to play, by developing our digital agenda and promoting innovation, tomorrow's jobs, artificial intelligence and big data. These are ways in which Europe can bring more added value in the future.

Climate change, which you mentioned, is in my view another structural component on which to build a European growth plan centred on innovation and technology. That strong ambition was expressed by the December European Council, when Ursula von der Leyen announced the European Green Deal. This will be a key focus for the years ahead, as this ambition to make Europe the

first climate-neutral continent is a very clear message addressed to universities, businesses, researchers and SMEs. It will be up to the European authorities to set the course and be consistent in trying to provide Europe with the resources it needs.

That will also be necessary in the discussions on the next EU budget. The Just Transition Fund is a key component, as it will indicate how we can realistically use the funds available to adapt our infrastructure and prepare for the future we want with regard to climate change.

We face many challenges at the European level, which we will come back to shortly.

Brexit is undoubtedly an important topic. We respect the choice that British voters made in the referendum, although we regret it. The withdrawal agreement has now been endorsed and we are entering the second stage of negotiations. It is very important to maintain the unity we have between the 27 EU countries, in the hope that we can keep a close relationship with the United Kingdom in various areas, including the economy, trade, security, and geopolitical matters.

Then there's a final matter I would like to mention at this stage: our shared ambition, which we'll need to bolster so that the European Union can exert at international level a degree of political and diplomatic influence that is more in keeping with its economic and political weight. We are talking about 500 million citizens, in democracies and under the rule of law, with strong, universal values of dignity. We have values to promote at international level. We also have interests to defend at international level, in our relations with the other major world regions.

It is vital that we become a bigger player on the international stage and don't allow others to decide for us the destiny of the European Union. That seems to me to be the central concern, specifically in order to prevent the difficult situations we have known in the past, with Europe faced at times with major migration inflows, sometimes even of irregular or illegal migration. This is one aspect of our ability to attempt to tackle a number of challenges, and to do so in a spirit of European cohesion and unity. Migration will be the subject of one of the discussions we'll be holding in the European Council in the months ahead.

To sum up, I would like to thank the chancellor again for welcoming me here. I'm glad to have this chance to deepen our dialogue, because it is very important to me personally and as President of the European Council to clearly understand the political priorities of the different governments in Europe. I believe this clear understanding is key to the trust we share. Having the trust of a European leader is very important to me, because I know that our mutual trust, the proper understanding of different priorities, is the indispensable first step towards reaching decisions together.

In recent years we've seen the European Union facing frequent crises – a financial crisis, a fiscal crisis, a migration crisis and Brexit. But I am entirely convinced that this new institutional cycle, with a new European

Commission, a new European Parliament and a new European Council, needs to be the starting point for a more positive European Union agenda. We, as European leaders, need to decide to take greater control of our destiny, to identify the priorities on which decisions must be taken in the interest of the peoples of Europe while respecting the different sensibilities in different European countries.

Thank you for this opportunity to meet. Thank you in advance for the work which – I am quite sure – we will do together over the coming years. Thank you very much.

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## [Intervention du président Charles Michel après sa rencontre avec le chancelier fédéral autrichien, Sebastian Kurz](#)

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