

Press release – Sakharov Prize 2020: press conference with EP President Sassoli and laureates



This year's [Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought](#) has been awarded to [the Belarusian democratic opposition](#), represented by, among others, opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. Read more on all the laureates [here](#).

The press conference on Wednesday will take place immediately after the 2020 Sakharov Prize award ceremony in Brussels and is expected to start at around 12.40 CET.

Interpretation will be available in English, French, German, Italian, Belarusian and Russian.

Journalists wishing to actively participate and ask questions, please connect via Interactio by using the link

<https://broadcaster.interactio.io/join?code=HIAGWR22EJPB>.

You can also follow it live from 12.40 via Parliament's [webstreaming](#) and [EbS+](#).

When: Wednesday, 16 December 2020, at 12.40 CET

Where: Paul-Henri Spaak building, room 0A50 (Anna Politkovskaya) and remotely via Interactio (see below)

Information for the media – Use Interactio to ask questions

Interactio is only supported on iPad (with the Safari browser) and Mac/Windows (with the Google Chrome browser).

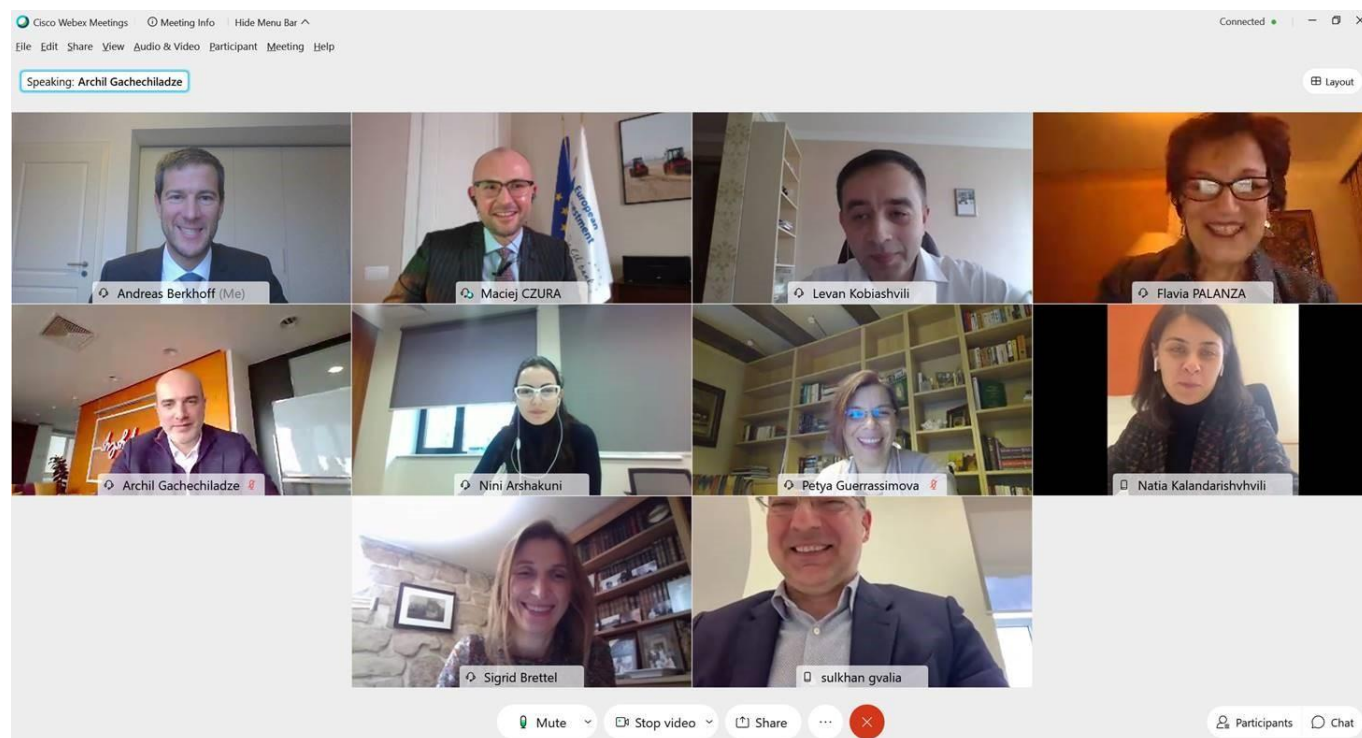
When [connecting](#), enter your name and the media you are representing in the first name / last name fields.

For better sound quality, use headphones and a microphone. Interpretation is only possible for interventions with video.

Journalists who have never used Interactio before are asked to connect 30 minutes before the start of the press conference to perform a connection test. IT assistance can be provided if necessary.

For more details, check the [connection guidelines](#) and [recommendations for remote speakers](#).

[Georgia: Team Europe – EIB and Bank of Georgia expand credit line for SMEs and mid-caps with €25 million to aid recovery from COVID-19 pandemic](#)



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- The EIB will top up its existing credit line at the Bank of Georgia €25 million to a total of €75 million to support the recovery of Georgian SMEs from the pandemic, extending coverage to include mid-caps.
- The operation is part of the Team Europe's COVID-19 emergency response to help sustain jobs, maintain liquidity and operations, and fuel the economic recovery of Georgia.

- **Since 2007, the EU bank has invested close to €2 billion in all key sectors of the Georgian economy, including connectivity, healthcare and SMEs.**

The European Investment Bank (EIB), the lending arm of the European Union, will invest €25 million to expand a credit line for Georgian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and mid-caps available at the Bank of Georgia, helping to accelerate the recovery of the national economy from the COVID-19 pandemic. The credit line can be disbursed in multiple currencies, including in lari, Georgia's national currency.

The EIB loan will inject fresh capital into the national economy at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic is burdening SMEs with liquidity issues and restricting their ability to access finance and maintain daily operations or fund expansion plans.

The investment from the EU bank will reinforce SMEs and mid-caps, which are the backbone of the Georgian economy and major employers in the country, and the country's financial sector, boosting their ability to drive the economic recovery from the pandemic.

EIB Vice-President Teresa Czerwińska, who is in charge of operations in Georgia, said: "As the bank of the European Union, we are proud to be bolstering Georgia and its economy in this hour of need, no matter how difficult the situation is. The EIB financing will support both Georgian SMEs and the country's financial sector so that they can continue to operate despite the pandemic and drive the Georgian economy forward. This means we will save jobs, incomes and revenues. Together with our partners in the country's public and private sector, we look forward to building a prosperous and sustainable future for Georgia."

EU Ambassador to Georgia Carl Hartzell said: The EU stands by Georgia during the pandemic. The EU has mobilised an unprecedented GEL 1.5 billion COVID-19 support package for Georgia, of which economic recovery of businesses is a fundamental part. This top-up by the EU bank strengthens this component by providing more assistance via local Georgian banks. Thanks to this agreement, an additional number of Georgian small and medium businesses will be able to access finance to get them through these challenging times.

Bank of Georgia CEO Archil Gachechiladze commented: "I am very glad to see that our very successful partnership with the EIB is continuing. The multi-currency long-term facility gives us flexibility to utilise the funds according to the currency and maturity needs of our SME and mid-cap clients. Such facilities are key for the private sector, especially during these challenging times, and this further strengthens our position as a leading provider of long-term financial resources on the market. I would like to thank the EIB for its cooperation with us and look forward to many more successful deals in the future."

Team Europe adds value for Georgian companies

Covered by a guarantee from the European Union, the loan from the EU bank

will enable the Bank of Georgia to increase its lending activities without jeopardising the long-term stability of the country's financial sector or its ability to support the economic recovery from the pandemic in the long term.

The credit line is even more attractive due to the more flexible terms enabled by the EIB's COVID-19 emergency measures, extended as part of the Team Europe's efforts to support partner countries such as Georgia during the pandemic.

This is the third operation between the EIB and the Bank of Georgia supporting the country's SMEs and mid-caps. To date, the EU bank has invested more than €330 million in credit lines for Georgian SMEs and mid-caps, sustaining more than 54 000 jobs in the country.

The EIB in Georgia:

Since the beginning of operations in Georgia in 2007, the EIB has invested close to €2 billion in 23 projects in infrastructure, the private sector and climate action. The EIB stepped up its support for the country with the 2014 Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area between Georgia and the European Union, making it the main EIB lending beneficiary per capita in the EU Eastern Neighbourhood.

The EIB finances most projects in Georgia under the EU External Lending Mandate. This provides the EIB with a guarantee covered by the EU budget for projects in the fields of social and economic infrastructure, local private sector development and climate action. For more information on the EIB's activities in Georgia please follow [this link](#).

[Press release – Parliament adopts deal to improve quality of tap water and reduce plastic litter](#)



On Tuesday, Parliament approved the agreement with member states on the new drinking water directive.

The new rules are designed to offer high quality tap water across the EU. This is in response to the demands of over 1.8 million Europeans who signed the first-ever successful European Citizens' Initiative, "[Right2Water](#)", in support of improving access to safe drinking water for all Europeans.

To this end, member states shall ensure the free provision of water in public buildings and should encourage restaurants, canteens, and catering services to give customers water for free or for a low service fee. Member states should also take measures to improve access to water for vulnerable groups, such as refugees, nomadic communities, homeless people, and minority cultures such as the Roma and Travellers.

Monitoring and improving the quality of tap water

To enable and encourage people to drink tap water rather than bottled water, the quality of tap water will be improved by imposing stricter limits for

certain pollutants, including lead.

By early 2022, the Commission will draw up and monitor a list of substances or compounds of public or scientific concern to health. These will include pharmaceuticals, endocrine-disrupting compounds, and microplastics.

The Commission shall also establish European lists indicating which substances are authorised to come into contact with drinking water.

Member states shall ensure that measures taken to implement the new standards are based on the precautionary principle and under no circumstances lead to the deterioration of the present quality of drinking water.

Quote

“Twenty years after the first drinking water directive came into force, it is time to update and tighten the threshold for certain contaminants, such as lead. For the European Parliament, it was of utmost importance that the new directive makes our drinking water even safer and takes into account emerging pollutants. I therefore welcome the directive’s provisions for microplastics and endocrine disruptors such as Bisphenol A”, said lead MEP [Christophe Hansen](#) (EPP, LU).

Next steps

The directive will enter into force 12 days after its publication in the Official Journal of the EU. Within two years of passing into law, member states shall make the necessary changes to comply with the directive.

Background

According to the European Commission, lower consumption of bottled water could [help EU households save more than 600 million EUR per year](#). If confidence in tap water improves, citizens can also contribute to reducing plastic waste from bottled water, which would also reduce marine litter. Plastic bottles are one of the most common single use plastic items found on European beaches.

[Team Europe contributes €500 million to COVAX initiative to provide one billion COVID-19 vaccine doses for low and middle income countries](#)



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- **High-risk and vulnerable groups and healthcare workers first in line for successful vaccine**
- **Team Europe supports global initiative to fight global pandemic through €400 million European Investment Bank loan and €100 million grant to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance**
- **EIB loan guaranteed by European Fund for Sustainable Development**

Fair and equitable access to a successful COVID-19 vaccine, regardless of income, for millions of people across Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Pacific, and in Europe's eastern and southern neighbourhood, has been enabled by €500 million of new European financial support for the global vaccine initiative COVAX. Team Europe's engagement will accelerate global efforts to bring the pandemic under control and scale up distribution of a successful vaccine as soon as it becomes available.

The European Investment Bank today agreed €400 million of financing to support the participation of low and middle income economies in COVAX Advance Market Commitment (COVAX AMC).

This rapidly approved financing, guaranteed by the European Fund for Sustainable Development and alongside €100 million grant support from the European Commission to COVAX AMC, will support access to safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines in 92 low and middle-income countries.

This enables COVAX, a multilateral initiative aimed at ensuring global fair and equitable access, to accelerate up-front investment essential to deliver vaccine doses as soon as they become available.

"This vital funding from the European Commission and the European Investment Bank ensures that lower income economies are not left behind when a safe and

effective COVID-19 vaccine is available. Team Europe's support will play a vital role in ending the acute phase of this pandemic." said Dr Seth Berkley, CEO of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance. "This funding is a tremendous boost as we look to raise at least an additional US\$ 5 billion in 2021 to ensure equitable distribution of these vaccines to all those who need them."

"The European Commission and the European Investment Bank are strong supporters of COVAX, the world's facility to ensure fair and universal access to COVID-19 vaccines. Together with the EU Member States, Team Europe has so far allocated more than €850 million to COVAX, which makes the European Union COVAX's biggest donor. The European Commission and EIB's combined support of €500 million will enable COVAX to make one billion doses of vaccines available as rapidly as possible to people in low and middle income countries", said the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen.

"It is a moral imperative that no country should be excluded from access to COVID-19 vaccines because of costs. The European Investment Bank's €400 million support for COVAX is a response to this by helping ensure fair access to successful COVID-19 vaccines. Through this new loan the EIB is strengthening Team Europe's partnership with COVAX and accelerating an effective response to end the global pandemic. Since the start of the COVID pandemic the EIB has been working with partners across Europe and around the world to accelerate vaccine development, strengthen public health and help business weather the crisis, with more than €27 billion of COVID related financing approved in recent months. The success of several vaccine programmes, notably BioNTech's, backed by the European Commission and European Investment Bank, is giving the world hope that a recovery is closer. The time has now come to look ahead and ensure that all countries can benefit from this progress." said President of the European Investment Bank Werner Hoyer.

Jutta Urpilainen, Commissioner for International Partnerships, added: "By working together, Team Europe and its partners help to make the vaccine a global public good to help end the pandemic, ensure a sustainable recovery, and build back better. EU's €100 million grant and the €400 million EIB loan, backed by the EFSD guarantee, will support access, to COVID-19 vaccines in low and middle-income countries".

Prioritising vaccine provision to high-risk groups and front-line services

New European Union financing for COVAX will secure access to safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines for high-risk and vulnerable populations alongside front-line health workers in low and middle income countries at the same time as vaccines are procured for self-financing economies, including the European Union.

Ensuring global roll out of successful COVID-19 vaccine

The new €500 million European support for COVAX AMC will help COVAX reserve and accelerate doses for 92 low and middle income economies. Agreements between the European Union and partner countries across Africa, Asia, the

Caribbean and Pacific, as well as the eastern and southern neighbourhood, already exist under the European Fund for Sustainable Development.

Vaccines will be procured and delivered by UNICEF and the Pan-American Health Organisation (PAHO) on behalf of COVAX.

[Read the COVAX blog story](#)

[Press release – EP Today](#)



Live coverage of debates and votes can be found on [Parliament's webstreaming](#) and on [EbS+](#).

For detailed information on the session, please also see our [newsletter](#).

All information regarding plenary, including speakers' lists, can be found [here](#).

Higher quality of tap water

From 8:45, MEPs will debate EU water legislation including new drinking water rules, designed to offer high quality tap water across the EU, thus enabling and encouraging people to drink tap water rather than bottled water while reducing plastic waste. **Since no amendments were tabled, the drinking water directive was announced as adopted at the end of the debate.** MEPs will also assess the implementation of the EU water legislation as a whole. A resolution will be put to the vote on Thursday.

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Addressing the impact of COVID-19

MEPs will debate and vote on the €47.5 billion REACT-EU package to mitigate the immediate effects of the COVID-19 crisis across EU regions from around 11:00. The money will be made available over the next two years through the EU Structural Funds and investments will be focused on the sectors most affected by the economic fallout of the pandemic.

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Foreign Policy debates

From 15.00, MEPs will discuss with EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell recent developments in the Eastern Partnership, the situation in Mozambique as well as the 25-year anniversary of the process that created the Union for the Mediterranean.

In brief

Agricultural funding and recovery aid for food producers. MEPs will vote on rules to ensure a smooth transition from the current to the future EU farm policy and to release €8 billion in aid for farmers and rural areas.

Votes

The **first voting session** lasts from 11.00-12.15; results will be announced at 14.45.

Among other things, MEPs will cast their final votes on

- the agreement on the European Year of Rail 2021 (final vote)
- a harmonised risk management system, designed to enable clearing houses in difficulty to continue their services while minimising the risk that taxpayers might have to bail them out.

They will vote on amendments on

- a new strategy for European SMEs.

The **second voting session** lasts from 20.00-21.15; results will be announced on Wednesday morning at 8.30.

Among other things, MEPs will cast their final votes on

- agricultural funding and recovery aid for food producers
- the REACT-EU package

They will vote on amendments on

- the implementation of the Dublin III regulation
- the implementation of the Return Directive.