

[Press release – Croatian Presidency priorities discussed in the European Parliament](#)



Under the motto “A Strong Europe in a World of Challenges”, the Croatian presidency intends to provide pertinent answers to European citizens’ concerns, stressed Prime Minister Plenković in his [speech](#) presenting the four main priorities of this presidency: a Europe that is developing, that connects, that protects and that is influential.

The work of the Croatian presidency will be focussed on an agreement on the new Multiannual Financial Framework, the orderly withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union, organising the EU-Western Balkans summit in May and preparing the Conference on the Future of Europe, he said.

Commission [President Ursula von der Leyen stressed](#) that, in order to move forward, it is important for the EU to have a new budget that is balanced and fair, but also modern.

MEPs supported the Croatian presidency’s plans, with some of them expressing concerns about the treatment of migrants on the Croatian-Bosnian border. “Regarding migration, we look forward to the new initiatives on the Dublin package. We must finally create a balance between responsibility and solidarity”, replied Croatian Prime Minister.

[Catch up with the debate by VOD](#)

Video recording of Mr Plenković's speech

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/vod.html?mode=unit&vodLanguage=EN&vodId=1578989519930&date=20200114#>

Video recording of Ursula von der Leyen's speech

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/vod.html?mode=unit&vodLanguage=EN&vodId=1578990633334&date=20200114#>

Press Conference held by Croatian Prime Minister Plenković, EP president Sassoli, Commission president von der Leyen

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/ep-live/en/other-events/video?event=20200114-1200-SPECIAL-PRESSER>

[Germany: More living space for Berlin – EIB lends EUR 240 million to Gewobag](#)



The European Investment Bank (EIB) is providing the state-owned housing company Gewobag with a 240-million-euro loan, which is earmarked for the construction of 2,000 new residential units by 2023. The new buildings will predominantly meet “energy-efficient house” standards and therefore surpass the requirements of the applicable energy saving regulation (EnEV).

The contract for financing the project between the European Investment Bank and Gewobag was already signed. This cooperation will secure further affordable housing for Berlin.

“The low-interest loan from the EIB enables us to make further investments in Berlin’s housing construction in order to increase the state’s own residential portfolio. This also means that our tenants’ rental burdens are kept as low as possible. We are pleased to have a strong partner on our side with the EIB”, says Markus Terboven, member of the board of Gewobag.

“The lack of quality, affordable housing is a pressing issue in many European cities,” said Ambroise Fayolle, EIB Vice-President responsible for operations in Germany. “I am proud that the EIB has a long tradition in financing sustainable urban housing. Our loan to Gewobag brings more financially accessible and greener homes to many people in Berlin, and when we talk about the added value that a public bank like the EIB needs to deliver, this is a prime example.”

This loan is already the second financing project on which Gewobag is working together with the EIB. The project is not only in line with the EU Urban Agenda for livable and innovative cities, but also makes an important contribution to the EIB’s and Gewobag’s climate change objectives through high energy efficiency standards.

With around 70,000 apartments and more than 120,000 tenants, Gewobag is one of the largest real estate companies in the capital and nationwide. In the medium term, the state-owned housing company will expand its portfolio by around 15,000 apartments.

Press release – Jordan’s King Abdullah II to address MEPs



Jordan is an important partner for the EU at global, regional and bilateral level, in particular due to the country's key role in promoting stability and inter-faith tolerance in the Middle East.

This will be King Abdullah II's fifth visit to the European Parliament, following his previous visits in 2002, 2007, 2012 and 2015.

You can watch the plenary debate via [EP Live](#), and [EbS+](#).

[Article – Iran: can the EU help to defuse the situation?](#)



Relations with Iran have been fraught for years over fears that the country was developing nuclear weapons. The 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action agreement was meant to prevent this, but recent events culminating in the death of one of Iran's military leaders in a US airstrike earlier this month have ratcheted tensions to new levels.

MEPs will discuss recent development this afternoon. [You can follow the debate live online shortly after 15.00 CET.](#)

Read on to find the background to today's situation, including information on the nuclear agreement and the EU's role.

Nuclear agreement

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is an agreement to ensure Iran's nuclear programme remains peaceful in exchange for lifting restrictive measures against the country. It was signed in July 2015 by Iran, France, Germany, the UK and the EU plus China, Russia and the US.

Implementation of the deal started on 16 January 2016 after the International Atomic Energy Agency confirmed that Iran had complied with its nuclear dismantlement commitments.

Trump

Donald Trump, who became president of the US in January 2017, has consistently opposed the deal. In January 2018 he announced the US would stop implementing the agreement until its "disastrous flaws" could be addressed.

Despite efforts by the EU to address his concerns, Trump announced in May 2018 that the US was withdrawing from the deal and would re-impose sanctions. These sanctions mean American firms are banned from doing business with Iran while foreign businesses that do so risk significant fines and being blocked from the US banking and financial system.

The EU continued to defend the nuclear deal, saying it was subject to strict nuclear inspection and that the International Atomic Energy Agency had confirmed several times that Iran was abiding by its commitments under the agreement. The EU tried to come up with measures to enable companies to continue doing business with Iran without being penalised by the US.

Iran initially continued to comply with the agreement, but gradually announced deviations from the original deal, such as breaking the limit on how much low-grade uranium it could keep.

Escalation

Tensions flared after the US announced at the beginning of January that it had killed Iranian General Qassem Soleimani in an airstrike. US authorities said he was actively developing plans to attack American diplomats and service member in Iran and nearby countries.

Shortly after the strike, Iran announced it was withdrawing from the JCPOA deal and attacked two US military bases in Iraq with missile attacks in retaliation.

The situation further escalated after Iran said on 11 January that it had accidentally shot down a Ukraine International Airlines flight, killing all 176 people on board. Following the announcement, Iranians protested on the streets

The EU's role

The EU has called for a de-escalation of the situation and on Sunday France, Germany and the UK urged Iran to again comply with its commitments under the nuclear deal.

Parliament continues to monitor the situation in Iran and the Middle East and regularly holds debates and adopts resolution to highlight specific issues. For example, on 19 December MEPs adopted a [resolution](#) denouncing the disproportionate use of force by Iranian security forces against non-violent protesters. Parliament has also pledged its support for the nuclear deal over the years.

[Cornelia Ernst](#) (GUE/NGL, Germany), chair of the [Parliament's delegation for relations with Iran](#), said: "We as the EU have to make clear to the US, that the murder of Soleimani was a breach of international law and the fuelling of conflicts in Middle East is a threat to world peace. We have to make clear to the Iranians that violence is the totally wrong way to deal with demonstrators. The EU can and has to play an important role as a moderator."

[David McAllister](#) (EPP, Germany), chair of the [foreign affairs committee](#),

said: "I am gravely concerned by the latest violent developments in Iraq, after the recent death of Iranian General Soleimani and Iraqi militia leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis. There is now an immediate need for an urgent diffusion of tensions and for all parties involved to exercise serious restraint in order to stop the cycle of violence and reprisals. Further confrontations and loss of human lives must be avoided, with so many years of joint efforts to combat ISIS and bring peace and stability to Iraq and the whole region clearly at stake. Preserving the Coalition is key in this regard."

He also called on the EU to keep supporting the JCPOA agreement and on Iran to stick to its commitments under the deal.

[Green Deal: EU must stump up new money and mobilise local actors to deliver climate neutrality](#)



European Committee of the Regions welcomes European Commission funding proposal under cohesion policy and backs demand for additional resources and revised state-aid rules

The Just Transition Fund and Mechanism proposed by the European Commission today have taken on board the EU's regions' and cities' demands for place-based tools to address the transition towards climate neutrality. But Europe's local and regional leaders warn against diverting funds from EU regional funds – cohesion policy – and centralising the new fund's governance.

The launch of the [European Green Deal Investment Plan](#) is expected to trigger €1 trillion by 2030, and the creation of a new fund to support the transition towards climate neutrality in territories reliant on carbon intensive industries, responds to demands made by the EU's regions and cities. The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) – the EU's assembly of local and regional leaders – has called over the past two years for a dedicated EU funding tool to support the decarbonisation of Europe's economies and minimise the risk of job layoffs, profit losses and undermining economic and social cohesion.

" Making Europe climate-neutral by 2050 is no longer a question, but a necessity. To achieve this, we need fundamental structural reform across every region and city. It now needs member states to show solidarity, putting their hands in their pockets, and offer additional funding managed in partnership between all levels of government " said CoR President **Karl-Heinz Lambertz**, stressing that: *" This why it is of utmost importance that the*

European Commission opted to established the fund under the EU's cohesion policy, integrating existing EU structural funds. But the fund's governance must be consistent and avoid any centralisation towards Brussels or EU capital cities if it is to succeed “.

With regards to budgetary implications, **Vojko Obersnel** (PES/HR), Mayor of Rijeka and CoR rapporteur on the Just Transition Mechanism, said: “ We welcome that all affected regions will benefit from the Just Transition Fund and there will be additional money. However, € 7.5 billion do not make up for the severe cuts to the overall cohesion policy budget discussed by the Council. All additional financial promises by the Commission are high hopes for the moment – but will they be able to deliver in the regions?”. Looking at ongoing negotiations on the EU budget 2021/27, he added that: “We risk that the further cuts to cohesion proposed by the Finnish Presidency end up to become the solution to accommodate the financial needs of the new initiative. We'll fight together with the European Parliament and all cohesion stakeholder to avoid this outcome “.

The references to a revision of current state aid rules, included in the proposal for a European Green Deal Investment Plan and the Just Transition Fund, are in line with a position previously adopted by the CoR. They might also represent a first important response to a long-time demand by the CoR of applying to cohesion policy the same exemption applied to funds directly managed by the Commission (e.g. Horizon).

*“ We appreciate that the European Commission is proposing more flexibility on state aid rules for the regions affected by phasing-out of coal ” said **Mark Speich** (EPP/DE), State Secretary of North Rhine-Westphalia and CoR rapporteur on [Socio-economic structural change of coal regions in Europe](#) , adding that: “ The Commission is thus responding to the recommendations of the CoR . It now has to be seen how this flexibility can best be implemented. The future state aid rules should also allow the possibility to promote investments by companies in order to mitigate the threat of job losses. This right has to be granted to all regions affected by the exit from coal. “*

The European Committee of the Regions is expected to adopt its opinion on the Just Transition Mechanism in March.

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