

Annual Meeting 2020 between the EEA and Norway Grants, and FRA

FRA provided the Donors and the Grants Financial Mechanism Office (FMO) with an overview of progress under the various EEA and Norway Grants Programmes and Projects in which FRA is involved. FRA directly cooperates with the authorities in several EU Member States which are Grants' beneficiaries.

Discussions also covered other aspects of possible cooperation, such as the Fundamental Rights Forum 2021, joint EU Presidency Conferences on fundamental rights, civil society activities and communications.

Press release – EP Today



Parliament to finalise its position on CAP reform proposal

Parliament will vote from 13.15 to 14.30 on the three legislative proposals to reform the Common Agricultural Policy as amended by MEPs in votes held throughout the current plenary week. The results of the final votes will be announced at 17.00.

The then adopted texts will serve as the basis for EP negotiations with the Council to ensure 2023-2027 EU funding for agriculture stimulates sustainable farming and accessibility of affordable quality food throughout the EU.

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In brief

Women in foreign policy. At 9.00 MEPs will vote on a resolution proposing ways to improve gender equality in the EU's foreign and security policy. Results will be announced at 12.45.

Votes

The **first voting session** lasts from 09.00 until 10.15; results will be announced at 12.45. MEPs will vote on further **amendments** tabled to the legislative proposals on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform and on the above-mentioned resolution on Foreign Affairs.

The **second voting session** lasts from 13.15 until 14.30, on the CAP reform; results will be announced at 17.00.

The outcome of votes are published shortly after having been announced in plenary, on [Parliament's plenary homepage](#), under the column "Priority information and documents"

[Justice for victims: off and online](#)



Hate speech online is a growing problem, as FRA surveys repeatedly show. It is often where victims frequently come across racist, sexist and homophobic content. It is often where perpetrators feel free to vent and share their hate with impunity.

But hate speech is not the only problem online. Children face bullying, and women have to deal with harassment and stalkers. For example, [earlier FRA research](#) already revealed how 1 in 5 women were victims of cyberharassment.

As people spend more and more time online, such sentiments online can create a hostile environment where the recipients of hate feel increasingly victimised. This can affect how victims perceive the real world.

Online victimisation also applies to the issue of cybercrime and consumer fraud, an area of growing concern for European consumers, as our [recent Fundamental Rights Survey](#) shows. Over 1 in 2 Europeans worry about fraudsters or criminals misusing their online data and nearly 1 in 4 worry about misuse of their online bank account or payment card details.

To help victims have access to justice, Member States need to deliver on the rights of victims, as guaranteed under the Victims' Rights Directive.

This includes providing online tools for victims to simply and quickly report incidents of cybercrime and hate speech to the police.

Support organisations could also play a key role. They could provide easy online help to victims so that they can report incidents to the police.

At the same time, Member States should create new or expanded specialist police units to tackle online hate and crime. They would be instrumental in carrying out effective investigations and cooperating across borders to seek out and punish offenders. They should also be readily reachable by victims to report incidents.

Additionally, Member States should run rights awareness campaigns to inform consumers of their rights and what to do if they have become victim of abuse or fraud online.

As people increasingly live their lives online, access to justice needs to keep pace to offer victims the same protection as they expect offline.

[Joint press statement EU – Western Balkans Ministerial forum on Justice and Home Affairs](#)



The Minister of Justice of Germany and the State Secretary for Home Affairs, representing the Presidency of the Council of the EU, together with the European Commission, represented by the European Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, the European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship and the European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, met via videoconference on 22 October 2020 with their counterparts from the Western Balkans at the annual EU-Western Balkans Ministerial Forum on Justice and Home Affairs. The meeting was also attended by representatives of the incoming Portuguese and Slovene Presidencies. The following matters were discussed:

HOME AFFAIRS

Increasing information exchange and cooperation for better migration management

The EU and the Western Balkans reaffirmed their common interest in increasing bilateral cooperation for more efficient migration management, involving also EU Member States and EU agencies. The ministers expressed support for increasing regional information exchange in the Western Balkans region on the subject of migration. In this context, the ministers exchanged views on the idea of developing interoperable domestic information systems, modelled on Eurodac standards, in the Western Balkans to record data on migrants. The Commission reiterated its readiness to provide technical support.

The ministers agreed that the Western Balkans region continues to be under considerable migratory pressure and discussed the current challenges for their migration systems, including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the movement of people. They discussed in particular the gaps in the reception and asylum systems in the Western Balkans region, and committed to taking further steps to improve reception conditions before winter. On that matter, the EU called for immediate action to be taken to prevent the humanitarian situation from worsening any further. The ministers acknowledged the significant support for migration management that the EU provides to the region and agreed on the need to intensify cooperation, especially at operational level. In that context, they highlighted the growing cooperation with Frontex, including the need that the remaining Status Agreements should enter into force as soon as possible. The ministers also pointed to specific areas where further EU support would be beneficial, including the support for the proper implementation of bilateral readmission agreements, as well as EU support to Western Balkans partners for the return of irregular migrants who do not have the right to stay, to their countries of origin.

Terrorism and violent extremism: implementing the priority actions

The EU and the Western Balkans welcomed the progress made on achieving the objectives of the joint action plan on counter-terrorism for the Western Balkans and reaffirmed their commitment to implementing its objectives beyond 2020. The action plan remains a framework for joint work on common security objectives and for the protection of our citizens. The EU called on the Western Balkans partners to make progress on the outstanding actions, and in particular on the robust application and implementation of adopted legislation. The Western Balkans partners agreed to continue reporting on the implementation of the action plan. The EU and Western Balkans agreed that preventing radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism is of key importance for the region's security as well as for the EU's internal security.

Enhancing operational cooperation to tackle organised crime

The EU highlighted the importance of enhancing the participation of the Western Balkans in EMPACT's operational actions to further collectively address organised and serious international crime, building on recent successful joint operations against illegal immigration, trafficking of firearms and drug trafficking. The EU also reiterated the crucial importance of the relevant EU JHA agencies such as Europol, CEPOL and Frontex in strengthening the operational cooperation framework with the Western Balkans. Broader efforts, including alignment of operational standards and capacities should be pursued to that end.

The ministers also underlined the importance of a strong international legal framework for tackling cybercrime. In that context, the EU reiterated the importance of finalising the current revision of the second additional protocol to the Budapest Convention and called on the Western Balkans partners to also engage in efforts to guarantee that the Budapest Convention remains the reference instrument for fighting cybercrime.

JUSTICE

The EU and the Western Balkans during the COVID-19 pandemic: impact on justice systems and fundamental rights

The ministers discussed the impact of the urgent measures taken to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic on the functioning of the judiciary. They acknowledged the importance of balancing the need to ensure the continued functioning of the judiciary with the imperative to guarantee respect for fundamental rights.

Citizens are guaranteed civil liberties, fundamental rights and citizens' rights to ensure personal freedoms, to enable participation in social life, and to allow for political and democratic debates and democratic decision-making. The EU and the Western Balkans therefore concurred that the measures taken to mitigate the crisis should be necessary, proportionate and temporary and that they should be implemented in a non-discriminatory way, subject to judicial and democratic oversight and, overall, in line with European standards. Every effort should be made to make the rule of law more crisis-resilient.

The ministers acknowledged that, even in times of crisis, fair trial rights and defence rights of suspects and accused persons should be respected. They pointed to the increase in domestic violence during the pandemic, and acknowledged that support for and protection of victims of domestic violence warrants particular attention and dedicated measures.

The Commission underlined that ensuring respect for fundamental rights is a key factor in encouraging people to accept the measures and do their part. Specific attention should be paid to the protection of personal data and the need to guarantee the exercise of freedom of expression while trying to prevent disinformation.

Access to justice in the digital age

The ministers acknowledged the importance of digitalisation to ensuring the quality, efficiency and accessibility of the judiciary, as well as its resilience. The EU and the Western Balkans reaffirmed that basic judicial rights and procedural principles, such as the right to a fair trial, must be ensured when employing digital solutions, and discussed the next steps to digitalise justice systems further. As part of this process, the ministers highlighted the importance of operationalising a number of tools such as online databases and computerised case management systems, with the objective of having the latter in place by the end of 2021. The EU expressed its continued financial and technical support for the Western Balkans partners in further developing digital tools for the justice system. The EU and the Western Balkans suggested enhancing cooperation on that point. The Commission reiterated the importance of having a sound strategic and legislative framework, and of allocating adequate resources.

The EU and the Western Balkans also discussed how digital solutions can safeguard rule of law principles and foster equal access to justice. Concrete

solutions and examples were presented by both sides.

Rule of law and judicial reforms: key developments

The Commission provided an update on the first rule of law review cycle in the EU and underlined that it will continue to pursue a strong and consistent approach to its internal rule of law policies and the way the rule of law is embedded in the accession process.

The ministers took note of the Commission's presentation of key recent case law of the Court of Justice on judicial independence, which is an important element of EU *acquis* in this area.

The EU pointed out that the economic and investment plan for the Western Balkans, adopted on 6 October, refers to the need for Western Balkan partners to make more decisive progress on fundamental reforms and in particular on the rule of law. The EU also underlined the importance of creating a framework for fruitful cooperation with the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO), which is expected to become operational soon. The Commission invited the Western Balkan partners to work in the coming months to establish such a framework.

[Press release – Legislation with binding measures needed to stop EU-driven global deforestation](#)



There is currently no EU legislation prohibiting products that contribute to the destruction of forests outside the EU from being placed on the EU market.

Subsequently, European consumers do not know whether the products they buy contribute to deforestation, including of irreplaceable tropical forests that are crucial for fighting climate change or protecting biodiversity.

Therefore, the European Parliament on Thursday adopted a report with 377 votes to 75 and 243 abstentions calling on the Commission to present an EU legal framework to halt and reverse EU-driven global deforestation. MEPs made use of their [prerogative in the Treaty](#) to ask the Commission to come forward with legislation.

Mandatory measures needed to halt deforestation

MEPs say that voluntary initiatives, third-party certification and labels have failed to halt global deforestation and are calling on the Commission to present EU legislation with binding measures to halt and reverse EU-driven global deforestation.

They call for a new EU legal framework based on mandatory due diligence for companies, meaning they must perform a risk assessment of their products to identify, prevent, mitigate, and account for how they address the issue of deforestation throughout the supply chain. All operators on the EU market must ensure that their products can be traced to be able to identify their origin and ensure the rules are enforced. However, the administrative burden for SMEs must be minimum and operators with large numbers of suppliers should focus on those where the risk of detrimental impacts is most significant based on a risk assessment. Companies that fail to do so and place products on the EU market derived from commodities that endanger forests and ecosystems should face penalties.

The legislative initiative refers to several studies showing that prohibiting the entry into the EU of products linked to deforestation will have no impact on volume and price and that any extra costs incurred by operators would be minimal. It would also benefit businesses, as it would level the playing field by holding competitors to the same standards.

MEPs state that such an EU legal framework should also be extended to include high-carbon stock and biodiversity-rich ecosystems other than forests, such as marine and coastal ecosystems, wetlands, peatlands or savannahs, to avoid pressure being shifted onto these landscapes. The Commission should also provide definitions of what constitutes deforestation and forest degradation. They also believe that ancient and primary forests should be considered global commons and protected as such, and that their ecosystems should be granted legal status.

Members finally underlined how EU trade and investment policy should include binding and enforceable sustainable development chapters that fully respect international commitments and regretted that such provisions have not been fully included in the EU-Mercosur agreement.

Quote

After the vote, the rapporteur [Delara Burkhardt](#) (S&D, DE) said: “Everyone agrees that voluntary measures to halt and reverse global deforestation have failed. The adoption of this report gives us the chance to create a functioning and fair framework, based on mandatory due diligence. It is another important step towards halting and reversing EU-driven global deforestation.”

Background

Since 1990, 1.3 million km² of forests have been lost – an area larger than South Africa. Reversing deforestation is key to protecting biodiversity, creating carbon sinks and sustainably supporting local communities. It is estimated that [EU consumption represents around 10% of global deforestation](#) with palm oil, meat, soy, cocoa, eucalyptus, maize, timber, leather and rubber among the main drivers of deforestation.