

Press release – Parliament approves EU-Vietnam free trade and investment protection deals



MEPs gave their consent to the free trade agreement by 401 votes, 192 votes against and 40 abstentions. The “most modern, comprehensive and ambitious agreement ever concluded between the EU and a developing country” will contribute to setting high standards in the region, and could lead to a future region-to-region trade and investment agreement, said the Parliament, in an accompanying resolution adopted by 416 votes for, 187 against and 44 abstentions. The agreement is “a strong signal in favour of free, fair and reciprocal trade, in times of growing protectionist tendencies and serious challenges to multilateral rules-based trade”, MEPs stressed.

Almost all customs duties gone

The agreement will remove virtually all customs duties between the two parties over the next ten years, including on Europe’s main export products to Vietnam: machinery, cars, and chemicals. It extends to services such as banking, maritime transport and postal, where EU companies will have better access. Companies will also be able to bid on public tenders put out by the Vietnamese government and several cities, including Hanoi. The deal also safeguards [169 emblematic European products](#).

In addition, the agreement is an instrument to protect the environment and to

sustain social progress in Vietnam, including labour rights. It commits Vietnam to apply the Paris Agreement. Vietnam committed to ratify two bills as requested by Parliament, one on the abolition of forced labour, the other on freedom of association, by 2020 and 2023, respectively.

The trade deal can be suspended if there are human rights breaches.

Check [the details](#) of the trade deal.

Dispute settlement between companies and state

Separately, the Parliament agreed by 407 votes for, 188 against and 53 abstentions to an investment protection agreement providing an investment court system with independent judges to settle disputes between investors and state. The accompanying resolution passed by 406 votes for, 184 against and 58 abstentions.

Quote

Rapporteur [Geert Bourgeois](#) (ECR, BE) said: "These state-of-the-art agreements just adopted present a unique opportunity to further the EU's goal to become a geopolitical player that defends multilateral trade, rejects protectionism, and raises labour, environmental and human rights standards worldwide. The deals will boost prosperity, create new and better paid jobs, cut costs for companies big and small, and give them better access to each other's markets."

[Watch his speech here.](#)

Chair of the committee [Bernd Lange](#) (S&D, DE) said the following after the vote: "History shows that isolation does not change a country. That is why Parliament voted in favour of this trade agreement with Vietnam. With it, we strengthen the role of the EU in Vietnam and the region, ensuring that our voice has more weight than before. This is particularly important on issues on which we disagree, such as the role of the free press or political freedom. We also extend the room for manoeuvre of civil society. Our work from now on is to make sure the agreement is put into practice." [Watch his speech](#) during the debate here.

Next steps

Once Council formally concludes the trade agreement and the parties notify each other that their procedures are closed, it can enter into force. For the investment protection agreement to enter into force, EU member states' parliaments first need to ratify it.

Background

Vietnam is the EU's second largest trading partner in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) after Singapore, with trade in goods worth €47.6 billion a year and €3.6 billion when it comes to services. EU exports to the country grow by 5-7 percent annually, yet the EU's trade deficit with Vietnam was €27 billion in 2018.

The main EU imports from Vietnam include telecommunications equipment, clothing and food products. The EU mainly exports goods such as machinery and transport equipment, chemicals and agricultural products to Vietnam.

[Press release – EU budget debate ahead of crucial summit](#)



MEPs will reiterate their call for an ambitious Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2021-2027 that ensures that priority areas like climate action, research, digitalisation, support for young people (Erasmus+, youth employment) and for SMEs receive adequate funding, without jeopardising the continuity of support for rural communities, farmers and poorer regions. Budgetary means to deal with the aftermath of the financial crisis, migration and security issues also need to be guaranteed.

EU heads of state or government will discuss the EU's long-term budget for 2021-2027 during a special meeting of the European Council on 20 February 2020. They still have not agreed on a common position to serve as a mandate to start negotiations with Parliament, which [adopted its position in November 2018](#), following the [Commission's proposal in May 2018](#). The Parliament has to give its consent to the next MFF.

Check the [MFF Q&A](#) and a [structured list with the most important links](#) for complete and up-to-date information.

EP President David Sassoli will hold a [press conference](#) on the MFF on Wednesday at 13:00.

A [press conference](#) by EP rapporteurs involved in MFF-related negotiations

with the Council on Erasmus, Creative Europe and the European Solidarity Corps is scheduled for Wednesday, at 15:00.

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

[Press release – Syria, Africa, Venezuela and US Middle East plan to be debated with Borrell](#)



As a first item, MEPs will question EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell about Venezuelan politicians illegally entering the EU, in a breach of sanctions decided by the European Council.

The US Middle East plan aiming to find a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, foresees both a future Palestinian state and recognition of Israeli sovereignty over settlements in the occupied West Bank. It considers Jerusalem as Israel's "undivided" capital, while permitting a future Palestinian capital to include parts of East Jerusalem.

A number of key actors, including the Palestinian leadership, the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) have rejected the plan in its entirety. EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell, who will participate in the debate, has also [denounced it in a recent statement](#).

The same day, the European Parliament will also take stock of the current security situation in Syria with Josep Borrell.

[The new comprehensive EU-Africa strategy](#) will be debated the same afternoon with Commissioner Urpilainen.

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

[Article – Female genital mutilation: where, why and consequences](#)



Female genital mutilation (FGM) refers to procedures involving the partial or complete removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genitals for non-medical reasons. Usually it is done by a traditional circumciser using a blade and without anaesthetic. Although internationally recognised as a human rights violation, about 68 million girls worldwide are at risk of it by 2030.

In which countries is female circumcision practiced?

FGM is primarily practised in about 30 countries in Africa and the Middle East. It is also practiced in some countries in Asia and Latin America and among communities coming from these regions.

Although it is illegal in the EU and some member states prosecute even when it performed outside the country, it is estimated that about **600,000 women living in Europe** have been subjected to FGM and a further 180,000 girls are at a high risk in 13 European countries alone.

What are the reasons for female genital mutilation?

FGM is mostly carried out on girls between infancy and 15. It goes back to a mix of cultural and social reasons, such as social pressure and convention, beliefs that FGM has religious support or ideas of beauty and purity. The practice predates the rise of Christianity and Islam and reflects deep-rooted inequalities between the sexes.

[Press release – New ECB Chief Lagarde to address plenary for first time at 15.00](#)



Greening the economy, the economic state of the Eurozone, Brexit and the review of the ECB's monetary policy are likely to feature prominently in Tuesday's debate.

On Wednesday, MEPs will vote on a resolution setting out their priorities on the ECB's role in assisting the EU's economy, and the green transition, among others.

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