

Appointments to the EU Court of Justice: sixth activity report of the Article 255 panel published

The advisory panel on judicial appointments established under Article 255 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union today published its sixth activity report.

The panel's task is to give an opinion on candidates' suitability to perform the duties of judge and advocate-general of the Court of Justice and the General Court. Its opinions are intended to inform member states' governments before they decide on the appointments.

The activity report of the panel provides a summary of the panel's work from March 2018 until October 2019. It also includes detailed information on the procedures it has established for assessing the candidates and how it interprets the requirements set out in the Treaty.

During the period covered by the report, the panel delivered opinions on 43 candidates for the offices of judge or advocate-general at the EU courts. 29 opinions were related to first terms of office, which entailed extensive examination and hearings by the panel. In total, eight of the opinions were unfavourable. The panel's opinions were followed by member states' governments in all cases.

Regarding the working methods used by the panel, some new elements in the report include information on the detailed conduct of the hearings and the types of questions put to candidates, as well as on the panel's approach to the renewal of mandates.

Together with the publication of its sixth activity report, the panel today also launched its new website, which provides an overview of its activities.

Background

The Article 255 TFEU panel is composed of seven persons chosen from among former members of the Court of Justice and the General Court, members of national supreme courts and lawyers of recognised competence. The panel in office since 1 March 2018 has the following members:

- Christiaan Timmermans, former judge of the Court of Justice of the European Union (president of the panel)
- Simon Busuttil, former member of the European Parliament and member of Malta's House of Representatives
- Frank Clarke, Chief Justice of Ireland and President of the Supreme Court
- Carlos Lesmes Serrano, President of the Supreme Court and of the General Council of the Judiciary of Spain

- Maria Eugénia Martins de Nazaré Ribeiro, former judge of the General Court of the European Union
- Andreas Voßkuhle, President of the Federal Constitutional Court of Germany
- Mirosław Wyrzykowski, former judge of the Constitutional Tribunal of Poland

Candidates are assessed against six sets of criteria: their legal capabilities, professional experience, their ability to perform the duties of a judge, their language skills, their ability to work as part of a team in an international environment in which several legal systems are represented, and guarantees of their independence, impartiality, probity and integrity. The panel stresses, however, that its assessment of candidates is an overall assessment.

The panel's assessment of individual candidates is not disclosed to the general public. In order to inform the general public, however, the panel's activity reports provide detailed information on its working methods and approach to assessment.

The panel's secretariat is provided by the General Secretariat of the Council.

Article – Plenary highlights: European Green Deal, future of Europe, Brexit



Parliament supported the European Commission's [plan for the EU to become climate neutral](#) by 2050 on Wednesday and called for a higher 2030 emissions reduction target of 55%. The previous day, they discussed a proposal on how to [finance this green transition](#), including support for regions affected by it.

Citizens have to be at the core of discussions on how to reform the EU, MEPs said in a resolution adopted on Wednesday, setting out their vision for the [Conference on the Future of Europe](#).

On the same day, MEPs adopted a resolution calling to ensure the protection of EU and UK [citizens' rights after Brexit](#).

Ahead of the UN biodiversity conference in China in October, MEPs called for legally binding targets at global and EU level to [stop biodiversity loss](#).

This week, MEPs also discussed [measures to tackle the gender pay gap](#). A vote on a resolution on this will be held later this month.

MEPs debated [the situation in Iran](#) following recent escalations, while King Abdullah II of Jordan underlined the importance of peace in the Middle East [during an address](#) to MEPs.

Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković presented [the priorities of his country's Council presidency](#) to Parliament on Wednesday.

Parliament also adopted a resolution criticising the [worsening situation in Poland and Hungary](#) regarding the rule of law.

Readout of the telephone conversation between President Charles Michel and Russian President Vladimir Putin

The phone call between the president of the European Council Charles Michel and president Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation took place on Thursday January 16, 2020 ahead of the upcoming Libya Conference, which is to be held in Berlin on January 19. During the call, president Michel addressed the situation in Libya and in the wider Middle East.

The crisis in Libya poses significant regional risks; the presidents discussed the importance of the cessation of hostilities. The president of the European Council repeated that the European Union fully supports UN initiatives and the Berlin process. The presidents are hopeful that all parties will come to an agreement to lock in a ceasefire and to re-launch the political process.

For the president of the European Council it is essential to reach out to all international partners in order to discuss options for de-escalation in Iran and Iraq. President Michel stressed that the European Union fully supports the JCPOA as an important contribution to regional security and a key pillar of the global non-proliferation architecture.

During the first contact between Charles Michel, in his capacity as president of the European Council, and Vladimir Putin, president Michel recalled the EU's position on the full implementation of the Minsk Agreements; noted the Paris Summit held in December 2019 in the Normandy format and welcomed the gas transit agreement concluded between Ukraine and Russia. The EU supports Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders.

EIB opens regional office to strengthen presence in the Baltics



- **European Investment Bank Group opens regional representation office for the Baltics in Vilnius, Lithuania**
- **Goal is to support business and strengthen relations with the public and private sectors, as well as to enhance its outreach in the three Baltic States**
- **Mr. Marco Francini appointed as head of office**

The European Investment Bank (EIB) Group has today officially inaugurated its regional representative office for the Baltic Region in Vilnius, Lithuania. At the inauguration ceremony in the presence of the Lithuanian Finance Minister Šapoka, the EIB's President Hoyer and Vice-President Stubb unveiled a commemorative plaque, officially kicking off the permanent representation in the region. The EIB Group representation to the Baltic States will be headed by Mr Marco Francini.

EIB President **Werner Hoyer** remarked: *"The Baltic States may be small in terms of population, but their importance for European unity is big. Moreover, their standing and weight in terms of business, technology and innovation is growing stronger than ever. We are delighted to open a regional representation in Vilnius, a clear signal of the EIB Group's intention and willingness to support Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the energy transition, as well as sustain their many innovative businesses, all to the benefit of the more than 6 million people who inhabit the region."*

Minister of Finance of the Republic of Lithuania **Vilius Šapoka** remarked: *"This is a very significant step for all Baltic states towards a closer cooperation with the EIB. I am delighted that Lithuania will have more*

financing alternatives in strategic areas that will also contribute to the economic growth of the country. Lithuania's cooperation with the EIB Group is presented as a good practice within the European Union and beyond, therefore we hope that through enhanced cooperation we will jointly develop innovative financial instruments in our country. At the same time, we will definitely implement many ambitious projects in green finance, FinTech and other areas."

The inauguration of the regional EIB Group office in Vilnius is part of the EIB's policy to enhance its presence in all EU Member States. A presence on the ground will ensure market proximity, an increased operational delivery capability for the EIB and closer institutional ties with the national authorities. It will improve project identification and screening, facilitate appraisal of new operations and develop financing opportunities with the European Investment Fund (EIF).

Article – Biodiversity loss: what is causing it and why it is a concern?



Biodiversity, or the variety of all living things on our planet, has been declining at an alarming rate in recent years, mainly due to human activities, such as land use changes, pollution and [climate change](#).

On 16 January MEPs called for [legally binding targets to stop biodiversity loss](#) to be agreed at a UN biodiversity conference (COP15) in China in October. The conference brings together parties to the 1993 [UN Biodiversity Convention](#) to decide on its post-2020 strategy. Parliament wants the EU to take the lead by ensuring that 30% of EU territory consists of natural areas by 2030 and considering biodiversity in all EU policies.

What is biodiversity?

Biodiversity is traditionally defined as the variety of life on Earth in all its forms. It comprises the number of species, their genetic variation and the interaction of these lifeforms within complex ecosystems.

In a [UN report](#) published in 2019, scientists warned that one million species – out of an estimated total of eight million – are threatened with extinction, many within decades. Some researchers even consider we are in the middle of the sixth mass extinction event in Earth's history. Earlier known mass extinctions wiped out between 60% and 95% of all species. It takes millions of years for ecosystems to recover from such an event.

Why is biodiversity important?

Healthy ecosystems provide us with many essentials we take for granted. Plants convert energy from the sun making it available to other life forms. Bacteria and other living organisms break down organic matter into nutrients providing plants with healthy soil to grow in. [Pollinators](#) are essential in plant reproduction, guaranteeing our food production. Plants and oceans act as major [carbon sinks](#).

In short, biodiversity provides us with clean air, fresh water, good quality soil and crop pollination. It helps us fight climate change and adapt to it as well reduce the impact of natural hazards.

Since living organisms interact in dynamic ecosystems, the disappearance of one species can have a far-reaching impact on the food chain. It is impossible to know exactly what the consequences of mass extinctions would be for humans, but we do know that for now the diversity of nature allows us to thrive.