

## Press release – Citizens to be the cornerstone of the Conference on the Future of Europe



Following a debate with Dubravka Šuica, Commission Vice-President for Democracy and Demography and Nikolina Brnjac, representing the Croatian Presidency of the Council, Parliament adopted a resolution setting out its vision for the upcoming Conference on the Future of Europe with 494 votes for, 147 against and 49 abstentions.

### **Putting citizens at the centre of the debate**

MEPs want citizens to be at the core of broad discussions on how to tackle internal and external challenges that were not foreseen at the time of the Lisbon Treaty. People of all backgrounds, civil society representatives and stakeholders at European, national, regional and local level must be involved in setting the EU's priorities in line with citizens' concerns in a bottom-up, transparent, inclusive, participatory and well-balanced approach.

Parliament proposes establishing several Citizens' Agoras (thematic fora of citizen representatives chosen randomly in line with proportionality and representativeness criteria), and at least two Youth Agoras, each comprising 200-300 citizens with a minimum of three per member state. Citizen representatives will discuss Agora conclusions at the Conference Plenary with

MEPs and national parliament representatives, Council ministers, Commission Vice-Presidents and representatives of other EU institutions, bodies and social partners.

### **Institutional commitment**

In addition to high-level support from the presidents of the three main EU institutions, Parliament urges Council and Commission to commit to the possibility of treaty change. The adopted text also underlines that a permanent mechanism to engage citizens should be considered.

### **Quote**

Parliament's President David Sassoli stated at the beginning of the debate that "we need to review all mechanisms of democratic governance following on from the European elections. This should be done in conjunction with national institutions and with the involvement of the citizens of Europe. We are ushering in a new era of reforms."

You can catch up with the debate here:

[Opening statements by Nikolina Brnjac on behalf of the Croatian Presidency and by Dubravka Šuica, Vice-President of the EC for Democracy and Demography](#)

[Statement by EP President David Sassoli, followed by MEPs' debate \(1st part\)](#)

[MEPs' debate \(2nd part\)](#)

[MEPs' debate \(3rd part\)](#)

[Closing statements by Dubravka Šuica and Nikolina Brnjac](#)

### **Next steps**

Parliament is the first among the three main EU institutions to adopt a position on the set-up and scope of the upcoming Conference. Negotiations with the Commission and the European Council should be concluded in time for the Conference to be launched on Europe Day 2020 (May 9) and run until summer 2022.

### **Background**

Parliament's position reflects the most recent survey findings. In the Parlemeter on "[Heeding the Call beyond the Vote](#)" (September 2019), European citizens continued to support a more important role for the Parliament, while data from [the Commission's Standard Eurobarometer \(November 2019, Table 102\)](#) show that 83% of respondents want "EU citizens' voice to be taken into account more on decisions on the future of Europe".

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## Press release – Brexit: MEPs concerned about citizens' rights



In a resolution adopted on Wednesday, MEPs take stock of citizens' rights in the context of Brexit and highlight that their consent to the Withdrawal Agreement will take into account "experiences gained and assurances given" about their protection. Parliament expresses concerns especially about the application-based approach used in the UK EU Settlement Scheme, the absence of physical proof for successful applicants, and its accessibility, among other issues.

MEPs question the set-up and independence of the UK's "independent authority" foreseen in the Withdrawal Agreement, stating that they would welcome the establishment of a joint European Parliament – UK Parliament scrutiny mechanism.

The adopted text calls for information campaigns to be launched to prepare citizens and urges governments in EU27 member states to adopt consistent and generous measures to provide legal certainty for UK citizens residing in their territory.

The resolution was adopted with 610 votes in favour, 29 against and 68 abstentions following a debate on Tuesday that focussed largely on the future of freedom of movement and limiting the impact of Brexit on citizens' lives.

Video of [statements by Nikolina Brnjac, representing the Croatian Presidency of the Council and by Ursula von der Leyen, President of the Commission](#)

Video of [MEPs' debate](#)

Video of [closing statements by Michel Barnier, EU's Chief Negotiator for the UK Exiting the EU, and Nikolina Brnjac](#)

## **Background**

To enter into force, the Withdrawal Agreement between the European Union and the United Kingdom needs to be approved by the European Parliament by a simple majority of votes cast ([Article 50 \(2\) of the Treaty on European Union](#)). Parliament will vote on the Withdrawal Agreement after the ratification process in the UK has been completed.

[Part Two of the Withdrawal Agreement](#) protects EU citizens in the UK and UK citizens in other EU countries, as well as their families. According to its provisions, all social security rights under EU law will be maintained and citizens' rights will be guaranteed throughout their lifetime. All relevant administrative procedures have to be transparent, smooth and streamlined. The implementation and application of these terms will be overseen by an independent authority with powers equivalent to those of the European Commission.

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## **[Article – Europe's one trillion climate finance plan](#)**



Just over a month after the presentation of the European Green Deal, the European Commission presented a detailed proposal on how to finance it. The [European Green Deal Investment Plan](#) is designed to attract at least one trillion euros worth of public and private investment over the next decade.

### **Why it matters**

[Turning the EU into a climate neutral economy](#) by 2050 will require massive investment in clean energy technologies. Only achieving an interim greenhouse gases reduction target of 40% by 2030 would require €260 billion of additional investment a year, according to the Commission's estimates.

[Find out more on the EU's response to climate change](#)

### **Where the money will come from**

Around half of the money should come from the EU budget through various programmes that contribute to climate and environment projects, for instance through agricultural funds, the [Regional Development Fund](#), [Cohesion Fund](#), [Horizon Europe](#) and the [Life programme](#).

This in turn would attract an additional €114 billion in co-financing by EU countries. About €300 billion worth of private and public investment is expected to be mobilised through InvestEU and ETS funds and another €100 billion should be attracted using the new Just Transition Mechanism, which is designed to support regions and communities that are most affected by a green transition, for instance regions that are heavily dependent on coal.

## Just Transition Mechanism

The mechanism will be based on three pillars: the Just Transition Fund, the InvestEU funding stream and loans from the European Investment Bank backed by the EU budget. All these instruments are expected to attract €100 billion in public and private investment – money that could be used for workers to learn new skills for jobs of the future, support for businesses to create new employment opportunities as well as investment in clean energy and the insulation of homes.

The fund's investments should especially help those regions that are dependent on fossil fuels, such as coal which still provides about a quarter of EU power generation. [The coal sector](#) in the EU employs 238,000 people in directly linked activities, such as coal mines and power plants, in more than 100 European regions from Poland to Spain. In 2015, there were 128 coal mines in 12 EU countries and 207 coal power plants in 21 EU countries.

Presenting the proposal to MEPs on 14 January, Frans Timmermans, the commissioner responsible for the European Green Deal, said: "It's a message to coal miners in Asturias, Western Macedonia or Silesia, to the peat harvesters in the Irish midlands, Baltic regions relied on oil shale and many more. We know that you face a steeper path towards climate neutrality and we know that the prospect of a different future – a cleaner one – might be a welcoming prospect in general but the road to it looks daunting today. This Just Transition Mechanism of at least €100 billion is a pledge that the EU stands with you in this transition."

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## VAT fraud scheme

14 January 2020

Last week, during a day of simultaneous and coordinated actions in nine EU countries, judicial and police authorities dealt a blow to a criminal organisation involved in large-scale VAT fraud with the sale of luxury cars. During the action day, coordinated and led by the French and Romanian desks at Eurojust, 26 persons were interviewed and 33 premises searched in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Spain, Latvia, Lithuania and Romania. In addition, over EUR 100 000, as well as luxury cars and products, were seized.

The suspects allegedly set up a VAT carousel for the purchase of luxury cars, buying vehicles on behalf of shadow companies controlled by French citizens. During these purchases, no VAT was paid. The cars were immediately sold in France using false VAT declarations at a much lower price, thereby defrauding the French tax authority. The estimated amount of lost tax revenue is over twelve million euros.

The presumed conspirators are suspected of VAT fraud, swindling, forgery of documents, money laundering, criminal activities affecting the financial interests of the EU and participation in an organised criminal group. As a result of disclosures from the Public Finances Directorate General (DGFIP), proceedings were conducted by the French National Financial Prosecutor (Paris) and the Investigative Judge of Lyon. The investigations were led by the Judicial Financial Investigation Service (SEJF).

After organising two coordination meetings with all involved countries, Eurojust set up a coordination centre on 9 January, supporting the operations through its assistance with the issuance and urgent execution of *European Investigation Orders* (EIOs) for the identification of bank accounts, account balances, properties and vehicles concerned, as well as two *European Arrest Warrants* and 51 freezing/seizure orders.



During the action day, the urgent need for another EIO arose, as it became clear that a bank safe rented by the suspects needed to be searched. A National Member at Eurojust was able to issue this EIO, in accordance with the new Eurojust Regulation. Numerous pieces of jewellery, five luxury watches and EUR 10 000 in cash were seized as a result.

The operation was led by the French National Financial Prosecutor (Paris) and the Investigative Judge of Lyon, assisted by the Service of Judicial Investigations at the Ministry of Finance (SEFJ) and, in Romania, by the Directorate for Investigating Organised Crime and Terrorism (DIICOT), the Prosecutor's Office of Bucharest's Court of Appeal, the Prosecutor's Office of the District Court of Bucharest and the Prosecutor's Office of the Local Court of Sector 6 – Bucharest.

For Romanian police:

- DCCO Bucharest – Service for Combating Economic and Financial Crime
- Brigade for Combating Organized Crime in Ploiesti
- National Institute of Criminology of the IGPR
- Service for Combating Economic and Financial Crime, Sector 6
- Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DIC)



Photos © Eurojust (top); SEFJ (middle); General Inspectorate of the Romanian Police (bottom)

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**[Press release – MEPs to debate](#)**

## escalating tensions in Iran, Iraq and Libya



Relations between the US and Iran were put under further strain when the US killed top Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani in a drone strike in the Iraqi capital Baghdad on Friday 3 January.

On Tuesday evening, Parliament will discuss the recent developments in Libya and the efforts to prevent an international conflict with Mr Borrell.

*You can watch both plenary debates via [EP Live](#) and [EbS+](#).*