

## EU Parliament week ahead: Vote on no-deal Brexit contingency measures

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News

MEPs will vote next week in Strasbourg on a list of “emergency” measures the Commission has drawn up to ensure that key links between Europe and the UK will be maintained in the event of a no-deal Brexit.



Members will vote on Wednesday on three so-called “contingency measures” in the case of a no deal.

A Parliament spokesman on Friday said the steps are designed “to keep the most basic things, such as transport connections between the UK and Europe, moving smoothly” after the UK leaves the EU on 29 March.

The Commission, she said at a pre-plenary briefing in Parliament, has proposed a list of such measures across a range of sectors and MEPs will vote on two of these next week: those covering aviation and road freight haulage.

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There are rising fears that a no-deal Brexit will result in long delays and queues at border checks at the ports of Calais and Dover.

## FRANCO-ITALIAN ROW

One of the highlights of the plenary will be a visit of the Italian Prime Minister, Giuseppe Conte, who will address MEPs.

This will be the 17th debate by a European Prime Minister with MEPs on what EU should look like in the future.

His keenly-awaited speech comes in the wake of a diplomatic row between France and Italy which emerged after France recalled its ambassador to Italy for talks on Thursday.

That followed Italian deputy Prime Minister Luigi Di Maio's decision to meet French "yellow-vest" protesters near Paris on Tuesday.

In response to the move, the European Green Party co-chair Monica Frassoni, a former MEP, said she "deeply regrets this escalation between the Italian and the French governments."

She said that the Greens "consider this provocation from important representatives of the Italian government as deeply divisive and not in keeping with the long-term friendship and relations of our two nations."

Frassoni went on to say, "Increasingly, cooperation between the two countries on key issues such as migration has become diminished. The greens are convinced that only if French and Italian citizens are engaged and motivated to work together and with other Europeans will it be possible to face the very difficult challenges ahead, including climate change, the erosion of democratic values and social inequalities."

"We stand united in our goal to build a new Europe. No diplomatic crisis or electoral manoeuvring will divide us from pursuing this common goal."

An ECR source said its MEPs will, in the debate with the Prime Minister, "continue to press the case for an EU that treats all its Member States equally - large or small - and does less but better by focusing on core specific issues such as security, migration and competitiveness"

## VOTES A-PLENTY

The Parliament spokesman said that as the assembly approaches the end of the 8th legislation there

will be an increase in the number of reports being voted on by Parliament.

Next week these will include reports on civil protection, animal transportation and cohesion policy, which makes up about 30 percent of the EU budget.

Parliament will vote on setting up the first EU-level tool to screen foreign direct investment on grounds of security to protect strategic sectors such as water, transport, or communications, and technologies, including semiconductors, artificial intelligence, and robotics.

An upgrade of the EU's civil defence mechanism, tested to its limits in 2017 and 2018 by forest fires, storms and floods, will be put to a vote on Tuesday, the briefing heard.

The new law, it is hoped, will help Member States respond faster and more effectively to natural and man-made disasters, by sharing civil protection assets more efficiently.

Parliament will also vote on EU 2021-2027 funding rules to keep investing in all regions to boost economic and social cohesion.

MEPs are likely to oppose cuts to finances dedicated to regions and approve new goals such as support to innovation, digitisation, energy transition, education and access to healthcare.

## **EU-SINGAPORE AGREEMENTS**

In a packed week, MEPs will decide whether to approve the free trade and investment protection agreements between the EU and Singapore, which will remove virtually all tariffs between the two parties within five years and allow for free trade in services, protect unique European products, and open up the Singaporean procurement market to EU companies.

ECR group co-chair, Syed Kamall, believes the deal is a "huge opportunity for businesses which will see the EU eliminate tariffs on all imports from Singapore, who will in turn grant immediate duty-free access for all imports from the EU."

Parliament, meanwhile, will vote on a new law putting an end to the discrimination that payment service users in the EU outside the Eurozone face. Banks would need to charge equally for cross-border payments in euro and domestic payments and make currency conversion costs more transparent.

## **ANIMAL WELFARE**

Following reports about the ill-treatment of transported animals, MEPs will additionally look into ways to improve their welfare and are set to call on EU Member States to better enforce existing EU rules protecting transported animals, apply tough penalties for offenders and improve transport conditions.

Danish MEP Jørn Dohrmann is Parliament's rapporteur on the report and says that data collection varies wildly between Member States and that there needs to be a stronger link between CAP payments and animal welfare.

The transport of live animals to third countries should be banned if their standards do not match the EU's as a minimum, he says.

Elsewhere, Parliament President Antonio Tajani will inaugurate its Radio Studio on Monday and unveil a commemorative plaque for Antonio Megalizzi and Bartosz Orent-Niedzielski, two journalists killed during the Strasbourg attacks in December.

A briefing will also be held to mark 100 days before the new European Parliament will be elected, which will focus on upcoming key dates and lead candidate debates.

## **SPITZENKANDIDATEN**

An EPP spokesman, meanwhile, told Friday's briefing that it had this week reinstated its support for the Spitzenkandidaten procedure for electing the next president of the Commission after May's elections and Parliament's biggest group "will reject any candidate that has not come out of this Spitz process."

According to the Lisbon Treaty, the EU's national leaders will meet following the election in May to propose a candidate to Parliament "taking into account" the results of the European election.

Under the Spitzenkandidaten process, each party in the European Parliament puts forward a nominee, who campaigns alongside its candidates in May's election.

The contender belonging to the party that gets the most votes is recommended to Parliament for confirmation as Commission president - although EU leaders have made clear they will not be bound by the process.

The EPP has put forward its own Spitzenkandidat: German MEP Manfred Weber who currently leads the EPP grouping in Parliament, the biggest in the assembly.

Weber is leading the race to replace Jean-Claude Juncker.

Dutchman Frans Timmermans, the first vice president of the Commission, is the Spitzenkandidat for the Party of European Socialists (S&D).

## **About the author**

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