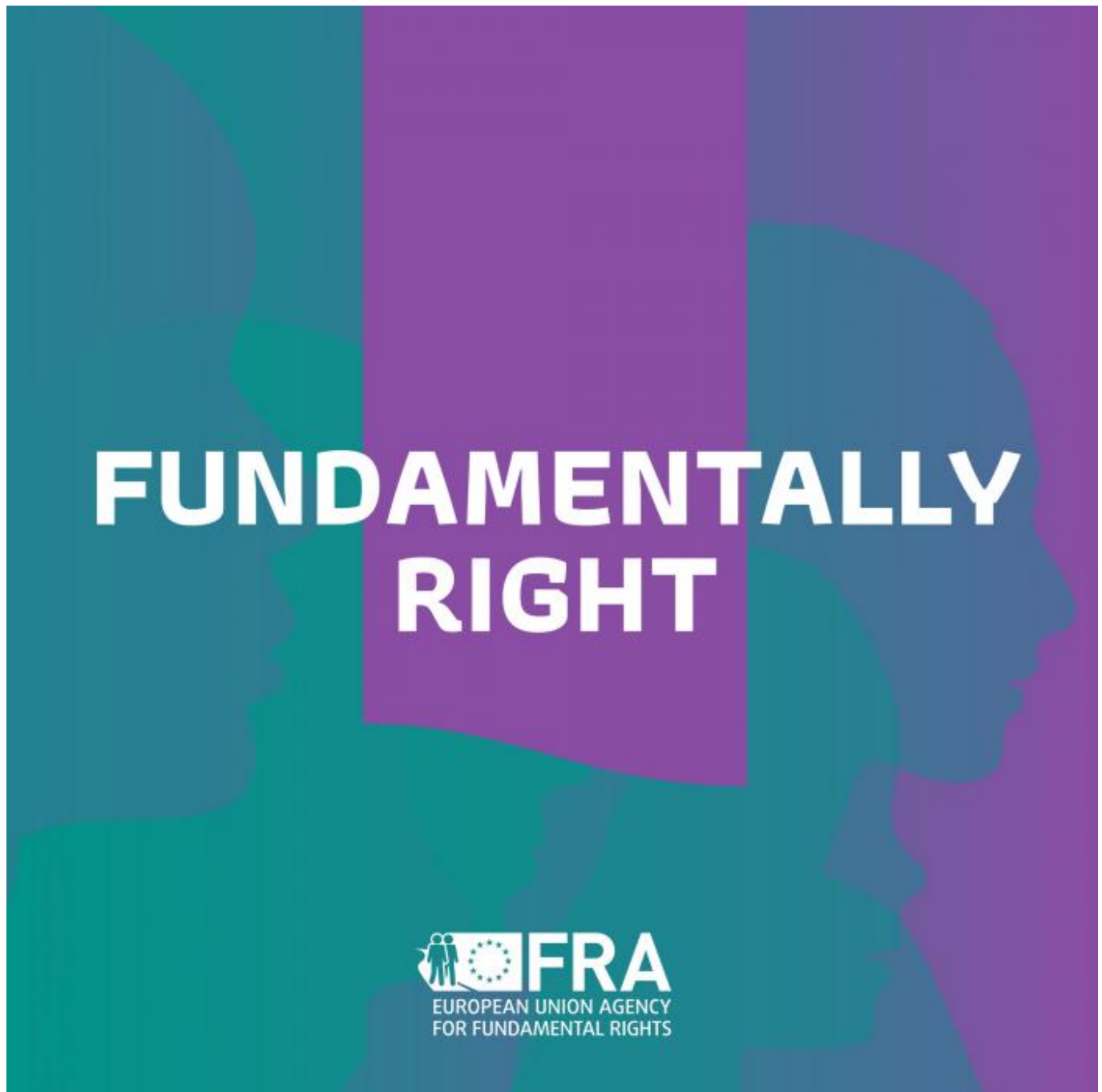


From freedom to fairness: FRA launches new podcast



What does it mean to live in a just and equal society? Which basic freedoms and liberties are we, as humans, entitled to? And how does the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights safeguard and protect dignity, respect, and solidarity?

Fundamentally Right, the EU Fundamental Rights Agency's first-ever series of podcasts, aims to find out.

In each episode a FRA staff member reveals their personal experiences of injustice, inequality and discrimination. It explores how these experiences inspired and shaped their careers as they strive to promote and protect

fundamental rights.

The first episode features FRA Director Michael O'Flaherty. It explores his life-long experience working on human rights including the segregation of Roma communities and tackling antisemitism. As a child, Michael saw first-hand how prejudice led to violence and hatred in his native Ireland. Michael shares some early experiences of violence against Irish Travellers. He also speaks about what motivates him to fight to protect human rights for people everywhere.

[Press release – UK and EU27 citizens in the UK to remain part of EP Communication programmes](#)



Following its decision in February 2019 to maintain the European Parliament's presence in the UK, notably through its London Office, the Bureau of the Parliament (President Sassoli and Vice-Presidents) agreed last night to adapt its communication programmes to ensure that UK citizens, in particular the younger generation and the millions of EU27 citizens residing in the country, are still able to participate.

Opinion multiplier groups, youth groups and organisations will be able to participate in debates and events offered by the European Parliament like the European Youth Event, which brings together thousands of young Europeans every two years in Strasbourg and online ([8000 young people took part in the 2018 event](#)). UK schools will also be able to participate in [Euroscola](#), an immersive experience that takes place in the Chamber of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, allowing secondary school students to learn about

European integration by experiencing it first-hand. British schools can also take part in the European Parliament Ambassador Schools Programme.

EIB Group and BTV join forces to provide additional lending to SMEs and mid-caps



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- EIB Group synthetic securitisation will enable BTV to lend more than €400 million to small and mid-sized businesses in Austria and Germany in response to COVID-19
- The operation is backed by a European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) guarantee under the Investment Plan for Europe

The EIB Group, consisting of the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Investment Fund (EIF), has provided a guarantee for a mezzanine tranche of a synthetic securitisation transaction of around €130 million to the 'Bank für Tirol and Vorarlberg AG' (BTV). The transaction was arranged by Erste Bank and is expected to provide capital relief under the EU Capital Requirements Regulation framework. It employs the use of a synthetic excess spread equivalent to the one-year expected loss of the reference portfolio.

The capital relief provided by the transaction will enhance BTV's risk-taking capacity and create additional lending headroom. As a result, BTV will create a new portfolio of eligible loans to SMEs and mid-caps of up to €435 million, mainly in Tirol, Vorarlberg, Vienna and southern Germany. The EIB Group operation is a direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic as the current crisis puts a particular strain on SMEs and mid-caps, which are experiencing shortages in liquidity and funding lines.

The transaction was made possible by the support of the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI). EFSI is the central pillar of the [Investment Plan for Europe](#) in which the EIB Group and the European Commission act as strategic partners to strengthen the European economy and its competitiveness. With support of the Investment Plan for Europe, the EIF will issue a guarantee covering two mezzanine tranches of a total of €130.53 million in a synthetic securitisation structure. This consists of an upper mezzanine tranche to be guaranteed by the EIF on an own-risk basis for €44.20 million and a lower mezzanine tranche to be fronted by the EIF and counter-guaranteed by the EIB for €86.33 million. The underlying asset is a €690 million granular portfolio of loans to SMEs and mid-caps originated by BTV.

EIB Vice President **Thomas Östros** said: "The transaction clearly leverages EIB Group synergies, and it strengthens BTV's capacity to increase the size of its SME and mid-cap portfolio. This is of particular importance as SMEs and mid-caps are struggling to have access to liquidity due to the current COVID-19 pandemic. I am therefore pleased to announce that our new cooperation with BTV will provide much needed support to SMEs and mid-caps in the Austrian regions of Tyrol, Vorarlberg and Vienna as well as southern Germany. Thanks to this operation, with the support of the EU investment plan, SMEs and mid-caps will have continued access to funding lines at favourable interest rates."

EIF Chief Executive **Alain Godard** said: "The EIF is pleased to be working with BTV and the EIB to provide additional access to finance for SMEs and mid-caps. The combination of the EIF's investment and structuring expertise and the EIB's efficient deployment of EFSI funds offers a competitive financing solution for BTV which will serve to boost the supply of finance in the real economy."

European Commissioner for the Economy, **Paolo Gentiloni**, said: "The agreement between EIB Group and BTV, backed by the Investment Plan for Europe, will make available a new portfolio of loans to Austrian and German SMEs and mid-caps. This will help them to access finance in the very difficult current context. We will continue to support businesses of all sizes as they navigate the crisis caused by this terrible pandemic."

BTV's CEO **Gerhard Burtscher** said: "The coronavirus pandemic has hit small and medium-sized enterprises very hard. By working with the EIB and the EIF, we will also be able to lend more than €400 million to medium-sized companies in Austria and southern Germany on favourable terms, thereby mitigating the impact of the coronavirus crisis."

Background information

About BTV

Bank für Tirol und Vorarlberg Aktiengesellschaft (BTV) is a financial services provider for export-oriented, owner-managed businesses and investors and has operations in Tyrol, Vorarlberg, Vienna, Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg and German-speaking Switzerland. Customers from northern Italy are served from Austria. The banking business is handled by around 850 employees together with Management Board members Gerhard Burtscher, Mario Pabst and Dr Markus Perschl. BTV, Oberbank and BKS Bank form the “3 Banken Gruppe” network. The BTV Group includes various holdings, such as Silvretta Montafon Holding GmbH or Mayrhofner Bergbahnen AG. BTV was founded in 1904 and has grown from being a regional bank to a business operating across borders in Europe’s most attractive economic area.

[Press release – EP Today](#)



Live coverage of debates and votes can be found on Parliament’s [webstreaming](#) and on [EbS+](#).

For detailed information on the session, please also see our [newsletter](#).

All information regarding plenary, including speakers’ lists, can be found [here](#).

COVID-19 vaccines

In a debate at 08.30 with Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides, MEPs are likely to reiterate the need for more clarity and transparency regarding vaccine contracts, authorisation, availability and deployment of COVID-19

vaccines. They are also expected to ask for additional information on the present status of the EU vaccines strategy for COVID-19, launched by the Commission in June 2020.

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Detention of Alexei Navalny

At 15.00, Parliament will comment on the detention of Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny in a debate with EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell. Mr Navalny was detained on Sunday upon his return to Russia, after having spent several months in Germany recovering from being poisoned. A resolution will be put to the vote on Thursday.

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Foreign Policy/Human rights/Venezuela

MEPs will assess the EU's common foreign, security and defence policies with EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell, calling on the EU to champion a rules-based international order. They will also debate with him the situation of human rights and democracy in the world in 2019 and the undemocratic elections for the Venezuelan National Assembly. The votes on foreign policy and human rights in 2019 will take place on Wednesday; a resolution on Venezuela will be put to the vote on Thursday.

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In brief

Refugees and migrants at the EU's external borders. The difficulties member states face in managing migration into EU territory will be the focus of a debate with Council and Commission from around 11.00.

EU-wide transport network. Parliament will discuss the state of play in developing the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) of railways, roads, waterways and shipping routes from around 10.00. A resolution will be put to the vote on Wednesday.

Votes

The **first voting session** lasts from 13.00 to 14.15, with **results** announced at **19.00**.

MEPs will take a **final vote** on provisional agreements on:

- Establishing a Technical Support Instrument
- Stronger EU powers in trade disputes
- Orderly termination of benchmarks in the financial markets sector.

They will vote on **amendments** on, among other things,

- Guidelines for use of Artificial Intelligence in military and civil sectors
- Strengthening the single market
- Revision of the Trans-European Transport Network guidelines
- EU arrest warrant.

The **second voting session** lasts from 20.00 to 21.15, with results announced on Wednesday morning at 8.30.

MEPs will vote on **amendments** on

- Common Foreign and Security Policy
- Common Security and Defence Policy
- Human Rights and Democracy in the world in 2019.

[Remarks by Paschal Donohoe following the Eurogroup video conference of 18 January 2021](#)



Good evening everyone, and a very happy and a healthy new year to all of you. One of my hopes for 2021 is to be able to meet Eurogroup colleagues around the table again and to do that in person. And then, of course, to be able to meet all of you in a physical press conference after that. The health emergency is still very much with us as we begin the new year. And indeed, the human cost of this crisis is very much in all of our thoughts. So for now, our discussions will still be taking place through a video conference in line with health restrictions. I will say a word about each agenda item.

I like to set the scene for our Eurogroup meetings with a broad economic discussion. For that purpose, the Commission presented an analysis showing

how the COVID-19 crisis runs the risk of aggravating the pre-existing macroeconomic imbalances in the euro area. But, of course, while we acknowledged that risk, we also acknowledged in recent weeks that there have been very positive developments. Thanks to the vaccination programmes being rolled out all across Europe we can now see light at the end of the tunnel. But there is, of course, no time a role for complacency, as new waves and as new variants of the virus emerge. We are still very much aware within Eurogroup of the need to maintain support to homes, to workers and to businesses as they face the economic consequences of prolonged health restrictions. Our discussion today reconfirmed the very strong consensus on the need to maintain a supportive budgetary stance.

Ministers also emphasised the importance of coordinating our efforts at the euro area level and the core fact that we can achieve more collectively than we can individually. And I'll be working with all members of the Eurogroup in the coming weeks and months to deliver that aim. This is, of course, precisely what is at the heart of the euro area recommendations. And with Next Generation EU we now have a unique window of opportunity to support reforms and to meet investment needs that are critical to promote resilience and to deliver a sustainable recovery. This brings me to the second agenda item, which is about the preparation of these plans.

We had a very useful and very important update from the Commission on how euro-area priorities are reflected so far in draft plans. Just to recall, those recommendations focussed on a supportive policy stance on convergence, on national institutional frameworks, on macro-financial stability and on completing the monetary union. Commissioner Gentiloni, I'm sure, will say a few more words on this, but the overall picture was, I think, one of the recommendations that are reflected in the draft plans. And I know that Paolo is working intensively with national governments to ensure these plans are ambitious, that they are credible, and that they can be swiftly implemented.

Putting together these kinds of plans is an unprecedented exercise, and the dialogue within the Eurogroup is really valuable in that respect, so that ministers can share their experience and learn from one another. We will continue to foster consistency and coherence between national policies, the use of the recovery facility and euro area priorities. And Minister Nadia Calviño gave an excellent presentation when she updated the Eurogroup on her work and the work of the Spanish government in making progress on their recovery and resilience plan.

Tomorrow, ECOFIN will also have a discussion focussing on the process for implementing the RRF. And I will be working closely with Minister Joao Leao over the course of Portugal's presidency on this issue, as we both consider this to be a top priority. Time is of the essence to roll out the measures that we agreed and to set ourselves on the path for a sustainable recovery.

After our regular Eurogroup, I invited non-euro area colleagues to join us for a very wide-ranging discussion with an invited guest, Professor Lawrence H. Summers of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Europe has long been a staunch supporter of the rules-based international

order. It is in the EU's DNA. As a participant in G-7 meetings, I'm also acutely aware of the tremendous responsibility we have to step up global cooperation in times of crisis. So with the inauguration of a new President in Washington this week, I thought it was an opportune moment to take stock of the international situation with a transatlantic perspective. We were delighted to have Professor Summers, who shared this insight with us based on his decades of top-level economic policymaking and crisis management experience. This crisis has reminded us that both problems and solutions transcend national and narrow boundaries. But today I sensed a shared optimism within the Eurogroup that we will see new dynamics in our engagement with our most important partners.

So, therefore, in the coming months, the Eurogroup will be returning to the subject of the international role of the euro, which is part of the broader interest in European autonomy and sovereignty. I think today's discussion of where things stand between the world's two global currencies and two largest market economies was an excellent starting point in this work.

[Visit the meeting page](#)