

Press release – The EU needs to comprehensively review its relations with Belarus



On Wednesday, the European Parliament adopted a set of recommendations on how the EU should reassess its relations with Belarus, by 602 votes in favour, 44 against and 44 abstentions. The assessment takes stock of developments both before and after the rigged presidential elections held in the country on 9 August this year, which resulted in a popular uprising against the current regime.

The text reiterates many aspects of the [European Parliament's latest resolution on Belarus](#), adopted on 17 September, and:

- supports the decision taken by the EU and its member states not to recognise the fraudulent election results as announced by the Belarusian Central Election Commission;
- underlines that Aliaksandr Lukashenka will not be the legitimate president of the country once his current term of office expires on 5 November;
- unequivocally supports the people of Belarus in their legitimate demands for new, free and fair elections, under international supervision;
- notes that Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who, according to independent sociological surveys, received more than half of the votes in the elections, is president-elect in the eyes of the Belarusian people;
- recognises the Coordination Council initiated by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya as the legitimate representative of the people, demanding democratic change and freedom in Belarus;
- demands an immediate halt to the violence, cruel repression, torture and crackdown against peaceful protesters, and that all political prisoners and imprisoned civil society representatives and journalists are

immediately and unconditionally released;

- calls on the EU to implement the sanctions agreed by the EU's foreign affairs ministers and the European Council as soon as possible, targeting a large group of people with asset freezes and travel bans, and widening the scope to include Aliaksandr Lukashenka;
- supports the initiative to set up a high-level mission to Belarus composed of former heads of state or government, whose task should be to help stop the violence, assist in freeing political prisoners and promote political dialogue; and
- says the negotiations on the EU-Belarus Partnership Priorities must be put on hold until free and fair elections can be organised.

The full set of recommendations, which in addition to the political situation in Belarus also address matters related to economic and sectoral cooperation, people-to-people contacts, nuclear energy and many other things, will be available in full [here](#). (21.10.2020)

Quote

"Belarus is in our immediate neighbourhood; its people share our European values and aspire to the same freedoms and citizens' rights as EU citizens. They want to be decision makers in their own country. The European Union cannot be a passive observer. Active measures to prevent hybrid or direct Russian intervention in Belarus must be taken. I urge the German Presidency of the Council of the European Union to lead diplomatic efforts to prevent any interference and to support the Belarusian people's democratic aspirations", said rapporteur [Petras Auštrevičius](#) (Renew Europe, LT) after the vote.

More information

The original report was prepared by the [Foreign Affairs Committee](#). Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya also [addressed Members of the same committee](#) and the Subcommittee on Human Rights during their meeting on 21 September. You can watch the debate again [here](#).

Improved rail passenger rights: Council approves the informal deal



EU ambassadors today endorsed a reform of rail passenger rights which will **strengthen the rights of all passengers, and in particular those with disabilities or reduced mobility**. The updated provisions will reinforce the rules on re-routing and make it easier to transport bicycles on trains. They will also promote the use of through-tickets, which improves protection in the event of missed connections. The reform had been provisionally agreed by

the Council presidency and the European Parliament on 1 October.

These new rules will mean clearer and stronger protection for those who want to travel in an environmentally friendly manner, even by bringing their bikes along. People with reduced mobility also want to, and have the same right to, travel by train, and this will be made much easier. A modal shift to rail is vital for the EU's efforts to meet its climate targets and promote inclusive connectivity.

Christine Lambrecht, German Federal Minister for Justice and Consumer Protection

Rail companies will be encouraged to increase the offer of **through-tickets**. These are single tickets which are valid for successive legs in a journey, and they safeguard the rights to re-routing and compensation in the event of delays or missed connections. Through-tickets will be mandatory if connecting trains are run by a sole railway undertaking, for example when a journey involves a connection between a regional and a long-distance train.

Passengers must be clearly informed whether tickets bought in a single transaction constitute a through-ticket. The rail company will otherwise be liable as if those tickets were a through-ticket.

Passengers will enjoy **improved protection in an increased number of different rail services**, as a large number of exemptions allowed by the current regulation will be phased out.

Stronger rights for **people with disabilities or with reduced mobility** will apply in the future as the current exemption of regional trains from most of the provisions related to persons with disabilities or reduced mobility will be completely phased out by 2023. From that date on, in particular the right to receive assistance when boarding and disembarking from trains will apply to all regional and long-distance trains in the Union, provided trained staff are on duty. Other improvements include the right to buy a ticket on board if there is no accessible alternative to buy the ticket beforehand, improved provision of information, training of staff and clearer rules on compensation for lost or damaged mobility equipment. The advance notice to be given by persons with disabilities or reduced mobility who require assistance will be reduced from a maximum of 48 hours to 24 hours, and voluntary arrangements for shorter pre-notification periods will be encouraged. Until June 2026, member states may allow a maximum pre-notification time of 36 hours if shorter periods are not feasible.

To encourage green mobility, it will become much easier for passengers to take their **bikes on board**. Passengers will be informed of available capacity. The transport of bicycles may be denied if the rolling stock does not permit it. So that such situations arise less often, railway undertakings will be obliged to install spaces for bicycles. The general rule will be at least four spaces for bikes per train. After consulting the public, railway

undertakings may determine a different number of spaces based on the type of service, the size of the train and the foreseeable demand for the transport of bicycles. Member states may also set this number higher if there is more demand for carrying bikes. The bike place requirements will apply when a railway undertaking orders new rolling stock or when it performs a major upgrade of older rolling stock. These requirements will be applicable four years after the entry into force of the regulation.

The new rules will clarify and expand protection in cases where passengers need **re-routing** to their final destination. The rail operator will have to try to re-route the passenger in all circumstances, including cases requiring alternative modes of transport. If the operator has not managed to communicate the available options to the passenger within 100 minutes, the passenger may take alternative public land transport on his own initiative and the train company must reimburse the necessary cost.

The minimum **compensation for delays** will remain unchanged (25% of the ticket price for a delay of 60 to 119 minutes, and 50% of the ticket price for a delay of 120 minutes or more).

A **force majeure** clause addressing compensation for delayed rail services will bring legal clarity and create a more level playing field in relation to other modes of transport, for which such clauses already exist. Rail companies will not need to pay compensation for delays or cancellations in circumstances they could not have avoided, such as extreme weather conditions, major natural disasters or major public health crises, including pandemics. Rail staff strikes will not be covered by this exemption. In addition, re-routing obligations will apply even in the event of a force majeure.

As the regulation lays down a **minimum level of protection**, railway undertakings are free and encouraged to introduce more stringent rules to protect passengers' rights.

The revised regulation will enter into force twenty days after it is published in the EU Official Journal. It will be applicable **two years** later.

Procedure

The Commission presented the proposal in September 2017.

Today's endorsement of the provisional agreement took place in the Council's Permanent Representatives Committee (Coreper). The European Parliament's transport committee is expected to vote on the provisional agreement shortly. The agreed text will then undergo legal-linguistic revision, and a formal vote in both Council and the Parliament ('early second reading') will follow at a later date.

Article – Deal on EU-UK relations must not compromise EU values



Reporting to Parliament on the outcome of the 15-16 October summit, European Council President Charles Michel said that the EU welcomes a close relationship with the UK, but not in a scenario where the UK wants access to the single market and at the same time diverges from EU standards and regulations. “You can’t have your cake and eat it,” he said.

Chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier said that the EU will continue pursuing a deal that is mutually beneficial. “The European Union’s attitude to these negotiations has in no way shifted and will not shift, not up until the very last day and not even then. We will remain calm, constructive and

respectful, but we will also remain firm and determined when it comes to defending the principles and the interests of each of the EU member states and the EU itself.”

Withdrawal agreement must be fully respected

MEPs stressed the importance of reaching an agreement without compromising the EU’s interests and values. [Iratxe García Pérez](#) (S&D, Spain) said that an agreement should not be reached at all costs: “Mr Barnier, you have the support of the S&D family in your final efforts to achieve the best possible relations with the UK. However, let’s not do it at the cost of sacrificing, for example, the internal market. We shouldn’t accept distorted state aid or social and environmental dumping.”

[Ska Keller](#) (Greens/EFA) agreed. Despite there being little time to reach an agreement because the UK government has decided to not ask for an extension to the Brexit transition period, “we cannot accept a deal that would endanger the single market, social rights or environmental standards”, she said.

[Dacian Cioloș](#) (Renew Europe, Romania) said the future of EU-UK relations has reached a “critical point” and called on the UK to stop using “delaying tactics”. The EU wants and needs a strong partnership with the UK, but for that to happen, the UK must be “a serious partner”, he said. “We will not ratify any trade deal as long as the withdrawal agreement is not fully respected, especially the protocol on Northern Ireland.”

[Derk Jan Eppink](#) (ECR, Netherlands) focused on the situation of the fishing industry in case of a no-deal Brexit. “When it comes to fisheries I think that the positions of the two sides is particularly distant.” If there is no agreement, bilateral negotiations must be possible, especially for small countries with a significant fishing sector, he said.

[Nicolas Bay](#) (ID, France) was of the view that a no-deal Brexit would be much worse for the EU than for the UK. “Brussels’ position has always been to punish the British people” for their decision to leave, he said.

Covid-19 recovery plan

MEPs also discussed other issues tackled by EU leaders during the 15-16 October summit, including the pandemic and [long-term budget](#).

“The developments of recent days have shown that the corona crisis is not a short-term crisis,” said [Siegfried Mureșan](#) (EPP, Romania), reiterating his group’s commitment to a quick approval of the EU long-term budget and recovery fund to ensure they can be in place on 1 January 2021.

The severity of the Covid-19 crisis makes a more ambitious EU budget necessary to protect public health, society and the economy, [Dimitris Papadimoulis](#) (GUE/NGL, Greece) said. “Stop bullying the European Parliament by accusing us, through fake news, of being the ones blocking an agreement.

In order to have an agreement, the Council has to move towards Parliament's position."

Just transition towards climate neutrality – Council agrees its position on new public sector loan facility



Just Transition Mechanism

The EU institutions are working to address the social and economic consequences of the transition process towards the EU's 2030 climate targets and the objective of EU climate neutrality by 2050.

Member states' EU ambassadors today agreed the Council's position on a new public sector loan facility to be created under the Just Transition Mechanism to support public sector investment in the regions that are most affected in the transition towards a climate neutral economy due to their carbon-intensive economies and lesser capacity to deal with the challenges of the transition.

The new public sector loan facility will provide €1.5 billion in grants from the EU budget to allow finance partners to support projects addressing the challenges of the transition process. As finance partner, the European Investment Bank is expected to provide €10 billion in loans, which are expected to mobilise up to €25-30 billion in investments to help the most affected regions identified in member states' just transition plans.

In its position, the Council suggests some limited changes to the Commission's proposal presented in May. Most notably, the Council specifies that the facility should not support activities excluded from the scope of support under the Just Transition Fund. This includes investments related to nuclear power stations, tobacco products and fossil fuels, according to the Council's position on this fund. In addition, the Council's position includes the possibility for projects receiving support under the facility to also receive advisory and technical support from other EU programmes.

The Council's position agreed today will guide the presidency in negotiations with the European Parliament.

Spain: Support for SMEs – EIB advances up to €20 million to finance PROSOL's RDI strategy



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- Los fondos del banco de la UE contribuirán al desarrollo de nuevos productos solubles y materiales de empaquetado más sostenibles.
- El acuerdo cuenta con el apoyo del Fondo Europeo para Inversiones Estratégicas (FEIE).

El Banco Europeo de Inversiones, BEI, financiará con hasta 20 millones de euros la estrategia de I+D+i de PROSOL, una empresa familiar que fabrica y distribuye productos de café como café instantáneo (soluble) y monodosis (cápsulas). Esta financiación se enmarca en el [Fondo Europeo para Inversiones Estratégicas \(FEIE\)](#), que permite al Grupo BEI incrementar su apoyo a inversiones que fomentan la innovación, el crecimiento económico y el empleo.

La estrategia de innovación de PROSOL, una empresa familiar ubicada en

Palencia, Castilla y León, se centrará en impulsar la digitalización, los proyectos de inteligencia artificial y machine learning de procesos industriales para hacerlos más eficientes y reducir los costes. En concreto, PROSOL, que es un proveedor importante de productos de café de Mercadona desde 2002, desarrollará nuevos productos solubles y probará materiales y procesos de empaquetado alternativos con el objetivo de hacerlos más sostenibles, reduciendo el impacto medioambiental asociado a su reciclaje.

La estrategia de I+D+i, que se implementará durante cuatro años, contribuirá a reforzar la posición de la empresa en sus sectores de actividad, ampliando la gama de servicios y soluciones disponibles para sus clientes. El proyecto persigue los objetivos de innovación definidos por la [Estrategia Europa 2020](#)

El vicepresidente del BEI, [Ricardo Mourinho Félix](#), responsable de la actividad del Banco en [España](#), ha asegurado: *“La innovación y la digitalización son esenciales para impulsar la competitividad y el crecimiento de nuestras empresas y la creación de empleo de calidad. Por eso estamos muy orgullosos de apoyar la estrategia de I+D+i de PROSOL, impulsando el desarrollo de procesos productivos más eficientes y de nuevos productos más sostenibles y con mayor valor añadido. Este proyecto demuestra el firme compromiso del BEI con la innovación y las inversiones verdes como instrumentos fundamentales para promover la recuperación económica e inclusiva en España y en Europa.”*

Rocío Hervella Duránte, la fundadora y CEO de PROSOL, ha declarado: *“Para el equipo de PROSOL firmar este préstamo con el BEI es un hito clave en términos de madurez empresarial y de políticas protectoras de la sociedad. Esta solicitud corrobora un profundo compromiso de la compañía con el futuro. Y la concesión por parte del BEI es un reconocimiento y un espaldarazo al valor seguro que representa PROSOL y un auténtico orgullo personal.”*

Apoyo a la innovación

La innovación y el desarrollo de competencias son ingredientes fundamentales para asegurar el crecimiento sostenible y la creación de puestos de trabajo de alta cualificación. Ambos juegan un papel clave para lograr la competitividad a largo plazo. Por ello, financiar la innovación es una de las grandes prioridades del BEI. En el año 2019, el banco de la UE facilitó 14.440 millones de euros para financiar diferentes proyectos de I+D+i. Solo en España, el año pasado el BEI proporcionó más de 1.320 millones de euros para apoyar los proyectos de innovación de las empresas española.

El banco del clima de la UE

El BEI es el mayor proveedor multilateral de financiación a escala mundial para luchar contra el cambio climático. El objetivo del Banco es liderar la movilización de la financiación necesaria para limitar el aumento de la temperatura media del planeta a 1.5°C con respecto a los niveles preindustriales con el fin de cumplir con los objetivos del Acuerdo de París. El 14 de noviembre de 2019, el Consejo de Administración del BEI aprobó sus nuevos objetivos climáticos y la nueva política de préstamos energéticos: el Banco aumentará gradualmente la financiación que destina a objetivos

climáticos y medioambientales hasta el 50% en el año 2025, con el fin de que el Grupo BEI movilice, en la década crítica de 2021 a 2030, al menos 1 billón de euros para favorecer inversiones que contribuyan a lograr estos objetivos. Asimismo, anunció el propósito de alinear todas las actividades del Grupo BEI con el Acuerdo de París. Para ello, el BEI dejará de financiar proyectos energéticos basados en combustibles fósiles a partir de finales de 2021.

Fondo Europeo para Inversiones Estratégicas (FEIE)

El Fondo Europeo para Inversiones Estratégicas (FEIE) es el pilar principal del [Plan de Inversiones para Europa](#). Ofrece garantías de primera pérdida que permiten al BEI invertir en proyectos cada vez más arriesgados. Los proyectos y acuerdos aprobados para su financiación en el marco del FEIE han movilizado hasta el momento 535 400 millones de euros en inversión, de los cuales una cuarta parte se destina a proyectos de investigación, desarrollo e innovación.