

BULLETIN

European Affairs in the Croatian Parliament



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The “European Affairs in the Croatian Parliament” bulletin is published monthly by the European Affairs Department. It provides the reader with an overview of parliamentary activities in the field of EU affairs and inter-parliamentary cooperation as well as with access to EU documents forwarded to national parliaments.

In Focus

United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union

The Withdrawal Agreement concluded between the European Union and the United Kingdom establishes the terms of the United Kingdom's orderly withdrawal from the EU, in accordance with Article 50 of the Treaty of the European Union.

The Withdrawal Agreement entered into force on 1 February 2020, after having been agreed on 17 October 2019, together with the Political Declaration setting the framework of the future EU-UK partnership.

The Agreement consists of two main documents:

- The Withdrawal Agreement itself, including a [Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland](#);
- A [Political Declaration](#) setting out the framework for the future relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union.

Activities of the Croatian Parliament in the Decision-Making Process

Activities of the parliamentary committees

European Affairs Committee held 56th session on 14 January 2020 in order to discuss the [Proposal of the Plan for Harmonization of the Legislation of the Republic of Croatia with the acquis of the European Union for 2020](#). Plan was adopted at the plenary session on 17 January 2020.

Monitoring the work of the Government in the European Union institutions

European Council

Prime Minister of the Government of the Republic of Croatia submitted to the Parliament [report](#) on the European Council meetings in 2019. The report is presented at the session of Parliament on 15 January 2020. On 17 January 2020 report is adopted.

Application of EU law

In January 2020, Croatian Parliament enacted 5 laws in the process of implementation of European law.



EU documents Forwarded Directly to the Croatian Parliament

According to the Protocol (no 1) on the Role of the National Parliaments in the European Union, all draft laws and communications shall be forwarded directly to the national parliaments.

The Croatian Parliament publishes on a daily basis the EU documents received, along with the information on: document number, adoption procedure, transmission date and subsidiarity deadline.

In January 2020, EU institutions forwarded to the Croatian Parliament [22 documents](#): 12 draft laws, 10 communications and other non-binding documents.

Inter-parliamentary Cooperation in the European Union

Inter-parliamentary cooperation in the European Union encompasses the cooperation between the European Parliament and the national parliaments and the cooperation among the national parliaments in the frame of the parliamentary dimension of the Council Presidency.

In January 2020 the Croatian Parliament representatives participated at the following meetings:

9 January – Zagreb – Croatian Parliament Speaker Gordan Jandroković met European Council President Charles Michel

The Speaker of the Croatian Parliament Gordan Jandroković and the President of the European Council discussed the main priorities of the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU. The Croatian Parliament Speaker presented the programme and topics of the parliamentary meetings that will be held during the Croatian Presidency. He stressed that the Presidency comes at a time when Europe is facing many internal and external challenges and that members of national parliaments of EU Member States will have the opportunity to deliver their share in addressing them.

Speaker Jandroković and President Michel also discussed the current topics in the European Union – UK's withdrawal from the EU, Multiannual Financial Framework and enlargement policy. The positions of EU Member States on these topics will be coordinated by Croatia in the next six months.

Croatian Parliament Speaker Jandroković highlighted that UK's orderly withdrawal from the Union is crucial in order to ensure legal certainty for the citizens and the business community and that the Union needs to establish closer ties with the UK in the future. While talking about the Multiannual Financial Framework he stressed the necessity of a timely compromise on further financing of value-added policies and financing policies addressing new challenges. He stated that Croatia will strive for a continued credible enlargement policy and work towards reaching a consensus on the confirmed prospects for EU membership of candidate countries and potential candidate countries, provided that they meet the established accession criteria.

9 January – Zagreb – Agriculture Committee met European Commissioner for Agriculture Janusz Wojciechowski

The Chair of the Agriculture Committee Tomislav Panenić and the Committee Members thanked Commissioner Wojciechowski for his visit and recalled the high expectations of the Member States regarding the proposal for a new Common Agricultural Policy framework and the funds to be channelled from the Multiannual Financial Framework to this sector. Panenić recalled the importance of reaching a compromise in policy-making and the importance of strengthening communication with national parliaments in the process of harmonizing European policies.



Commissioner Wojciechowski stressed that he perceived the Croatian Presidency of the Council, which has been occurring at an extremely crucial time for key decisions on the Multiannual Financial Framework and the new Common Agricultural Policy, as an opportunity to direct the debate.

Participants discussed a number of CAP challenges, such as a declining trend in family farms, depopulation of rural areas, the need to increase "green ambition" and additional funding for environmental and bio economy challenges, the problem of the concentration of agricultural lands in the EU, unfair trading practices and dumping rates for agri-food products.

It was pointed out that Croatia did not support the reduction of the CAP implementation funds and that the CAP could not merely be observed through agricultural production, but it also needed stronger protection of its social and cultural impact.

Commissioner Wojciechowski stressed the importance of exchanging experience and good practices among Member States stressing that agricultural policy should be more democratic in achieving its objectives. He also noted that strategic plans represented an opportunity to guide Member States' agricultural policies in line with the agricultural and processing sector's own needs, as well as the regional needs of the Member States.

10 January – Zagreb – Croatian Parliament Speaker Gordan Jandroković met President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen

The Speaker of the Croatian Parliament Jandroković and the President of the European Commission von der Leyen discussed the main priorities of the Croatian EU Council Presidency and the programme of the parliamentary meetings that will be attended, among others, by a number of members of the European Commission.

Speaker Jandroković and President von der Leyen stressed the importance of the Croatian Presidency that comes at a time when Europe is facing many internal and external challenges, including UK's withdrawal from the EU. They also highlighted that national parliaments play an important role in the European law-making process and in bringing European policies and topics closer to the citizens. In that regard, Speaker Jandroković welcomed the Conference on the Future of Europe and the continuation of an intensive dialogue with European citizens. He said that the European Union should strive for a stronger citizens' perception of the benefits of EU membership, such as improved quality of life and security.

In conclusion, they both said they look forward to a fruitful cooperation of the Croatian Parliament and other national parliaments with the European Commission on many issues of common interest.

10 January – Zagreb – Croatian Parliament Speaker Gordan Jandroković and the MPs met the College of Commissioners of the European Commission

During the meeting, the Speaker, Gordan Jandroković, and the Members of the Croatian Parliament presented the priorities of the Croatian Presidency, especially those that would be discussed at parliamentary meetings, to the College of Commissioners of the European Commission. It was emphasized that during the Croatian Presidency, the members of national parliaments would have the opportunity to exchange views with the invited Commissioners on a number of current topics.

With regard to democratic legitimacy, the members of national parliaments play an important role in bringing European issues closer to citizens, and in this regard, Members of the Croatian Parliament welcomed the Conference on the Future of Europe and the continuation of dialogue with European citizens.

Members of the European Commission expressed their full support for Croatia, pointing out that its successful Presidency represented the interest of all European institutions and Member States and were looking forward to future cooperation with the Croatian Parliament.



Current European topics were also discussed – UK’s withdrawal from the EU, Multiannual Financial Framework and enlargement policy, as well as major European Commission initiatives such as the European Green Deal.

Members of the Croatian Parliament particularly emphasized the Multiannual Financial Framework and the necessity to reach an agreement on the balanced further financing of value-added policies and financing policies addressing new challenges. It was pointed out that cohesion policy had a strong European added value, and due to its contribution to economic growth, social inclusion, innovation and environmental protection, it was particularly important for less developed areas.

Regarding enlargement policy, Speaker Jandroković reiterated how important a continued credible enlargement policy was for Croatia, stating that during its Presidency Croatia would strive for a continued credible enlargement policy for European perspective of candidate countries and potential candidate countries, provided that they meet the established accession criteria.

In conclusion, Croatian MPs welcomed the ambition to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent and the world leader, and emphasized that Croatia supported all efforts towards meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement.

19 – 20 January – Zagreb – Meeting of the Chairpersons of the Committees for Union Affairs

This is the first meeting organised by the Croatian Parliament as part of the parliamentary dimension of the Croatian Presidency of the Council, bringing together the chairperson of the committees of the national parliaments of EU member states and candidate states dealing with European Union affairs, as well as the representatives of the European Parliament and the members of parliaments from Georgia, Norway and Sweden as special guests.

The main topics of the meeting, which the representatives can discuss with the Prime Minister of the Croatian Government Andrej Plenković, the Vice-President of the European Parliament in charge of relations with national parliaments Mairead McGuinness and the Vice-President of the European Commission responsible for democracy and demography Dubravka Šuica, are the priorities of the Croatian Presidency of the Council and the role of national parliaments and COSAC in the decision-making process at EU level during the new institutional cycle.

Introductory addresses

The Chairman of the European Affairs Committee Domagoj Ivan Milošević highlighted the importance of COSAC and its contribution to the collaboration between the committees of national parliaments dealing with European Union affairs and the European Parliament. He said that the Croatian Parliament, as the body responsible for the parliamentary dimension of the Presidency, would contribute to reaching the goals of the Croatian Presidency of the Council by selecting appropriate topics of its meetings and conferences.

He continued by introducing the topics and speakers of today’s meeting. He particularly pointed out the role of COSAC as a partner to European institutions and citizens, as well as the importance that the Conference has as a platform for efficient exchange of views and transfer of opinions to European institutions.

The Earl of Kinnoull, the chairman of the European Union Committee of the House of Lords, addressed the participants at the beginning of the meeting and reflected on the current state of Brexit from the perspective of United Kingdom’s last participation in the COSAC meeting before withdrawal from the European Union. He said it was crucial to achieve the best possible outcome for all parties involved, and wished the members success in further building the European Union and its partnership with the United Kingdom.

Further discussion included the proposals for enhancing COSAC’s procedural issues.



Opening address by the Speaker of the Croatian Parliament Gordan Jandroković

In his opening address, the Speaker of the Croatian Parliament Gordan Jandroković said that the Presidency of the European Union is of major importance to Croatia for two reasons. Firstly, it comes just six years after Croatia's accession to the EU, reaffirming its strong commitment, present since it gained independence 28 years ago, to participate in the implementation of the European project, strengthen and promote the values and principles on which the European Union was founded, as well as the common policies that make the European Union a "single European family of nations" and the world's largest economy. Secondly, the Croatian Presidency comes at a crucial time for the European Union as it is facing numerous internal and external challenges. All these challenges are addressed in the four priorities of the Croatian Presidency.

He identified the United Kingdom's withdrawal, the Multiannual Financial Framework and the enlargement policy as the most current priorities, stressing that the consensual withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union should be a common goal that would ensure legal certainty to citizens and the business community, as well as provide a foundation for establishing closer relations with the UK in the future. As regards the EU budget for the next seven years, he said that Croatia would strive to find a balance between continuing to finance traditional policies relevant to the development of newer member states, including Croatia, and financing policies aimed at new challenges.

He also stressed the importance of continuing with the implementation of the enlargement policy. The stability of the South East Europe and strengthening of its resilience are in the interest of the European Union in terms of politics, security and economy. Croatia will, therefore, work towards reaching a political decision based on reaffirmed European perspective of existing and potential candidates, as well as on individual approach, their full compliance with the established criteria and consistent, but credible conditionality.

Speaker Jandroković also addressed the future of Europe and welcomed the continuation of dialogue with its citizens, noting that European citizens are the focus of the European project and expect to be heard at the EU level. They should gain more from the benefits and opportunities, as well as experience improvements in their quality of life and the security that EU membership provides. National Parliaments with their democratic legitimacy should have an important role in the dialogue with the citizens, and should thus engage in the work of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Finally, Speaker Jandroković said that during its Presidency Croatia will be firmly committed to a Europe based on common values, equality, respect for mutual interests, promotion of consensus and seeking of compromise as they represent the only way to overcome all challenges.

Key debate with Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenković

After the presentation of the Programme of the Presidency, the representatives of national parliaments – members of the committees for European Union affairs of EU member states and of the European Parliament – supported all Croatian goals during the discussion, in particular the adoption of a development-oriented and socially sensitive Multiannual Financial Framework with adequate financing of cohesion and agricultural policies, but also financing policies aimed at new challenges such as migrations, digitalisation and climate change.

The representatives supported the European and Croatian interests in maintaining the stability and peace in the neighbouring countries, as well as the efforts of the Croatian Presidency to reach a consensus in the Council with regard to the enlargement policy. In addition, the representatives of the national parliaments of the candidate countries – Montenegro, Serbia, North Macedonia, Albania and Turkey - recognized in their interventions the commitment of the Croatian Presidency to their European perspective.



Discussion with Commissioner Dubravka Šuica

Šuica highlighted the importance of partnership between the European Commission and the national parliaments, achieved through political dialogue and other instruments arising from the Treaties. She added that national parliaments played a central role in connecting citizens and European institutions, noting that the new Commission was committed to further strengthening the cooperation with national parliaments.

The Commissioner presented the Conference on the Future of Europe, which is set to begin in May 2020, and emphasised the key role that the national parliaments would have in the preparation and implementation of the Conference over the next two years that the Conference is expected to run. She confirmed that the Commission would publish a Communication on 22 January and called upon the national parliaments to join the political dialogue. She also outlined the next steps in the preparation of the Conference and emphasised the need to gain wide support of the institutions and all stakeholders involved in the preparation and implementation of the Conference in order to ensure its success.

Discussion with Mairead McGuinness, the First Vice-President of the European Parliament in charge of relations with national parliaments

Speaking of the Conference, McGuinness pointed out the importance of collaboration between national parliaments and the European Parliament as institutions that represent citizens. She also noted that despite the demanding preparations for a successful Conference, its motto remained simple – the Conference is a forum where we will listen to each other.

In the course of the discussion, the representatives agreed that it was necessary for national parliaments to actively engage in the Conference, but also expressed the need to adopt a coordinated approach that would ensure better results than similar initiatives in the past.

21 January – Zagreb – Parliament Speaker Gordan Jandroković met with delegation of the German Bundestag's Committee on European Union Affairs

This visit is the continuation of talks Jandroković held in November with Bundestag President Wolfgang Schäuble, about the need to strengthen cooperation between parliaments, particularly during Croatia's and then Germany's presidencies of the EU.

Croatia is chairing the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2020 while Germany will assume the presidency in the second half of the year.

The interlocutors assessed bilateral relations as friendly, allied and partner-like, and underscored that that is reflected in the intensity of meetings in several areas. Germany is Croatia's top trade partner and the highest number of tourists to Croatia come from Germany, which is also the third largest investor in Croatia.

Jandroković discussed current European topics with the delegation like Brexit, the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the EU's enlargement policy. He reiterated that Croatia supports enlargement because the stability of Southeast Europe is in the EU's political, security and economic interest. With regard to the MFF, Jandroković underscored the importance of reaching a compromise between financing cohesion and agriculture policies, and new challenges like migration, digitisation and climate change.

24 January – Zagreb – Domagoj Ivan Milošević, Chair of the European Affairs Committee and the Committee members met the European Commissioner for Justice, Didier Reynders

As an introduction, Milošević referred to the Meeting of the Chairpersons of the Committees for the Union Affairs (COSAC) already held and outlined the most important developments of the parliamentary dimension of the Presidency.



The European Commissioner briefed the members of the Committee on the most important tasks of the new Commission outlining the role of his portfolio. He stressed that he expected the assistance of national parliaments as the bearers of the legislative process in the Member States, and added that he hoped for their active role in implementing the rule of law as a fundamental value of the European Union.

Reynders referred to the most important tasks within the justice sector, which include, inter alia, ensuring the independence of the justice system, combating corruption and freedom of the media in all Member States. He stressed that citizens should be constantly reminded of the values on which the Union rests, especially the rule of law, which is a guarantee for the protection of citizens' rights. Milošević confirmed that the rule of law represented the foundation upon which society rests and stressed the need to strengthen systems and institutions in the area.

The talks exchanged views on the enlargement of the Union to the countries of Southeast Europe, the impact of internal migration on individual Member States, and the need to strengthen European legislation in the field of digital technology and artificial intelligence in order to meet the challenges it faces in this area within this new technological age.

28 January – Brussels – Croatian Parliament Speaker Gordan Jandroković participated at the summit with Western Balkans speakers under President Sassoli's patronage

As the parliament speaker of the country currently chairing the EU, Jandroković participated in a meeting of the parliamentary speakers of six Western Balkan countries, organised by European Parliament President David Sassoli.

Jandroković said the meeting was held to show that Southeast Europe is very important for the EU in terms of policies, economy but primarily security. As a neighbouring country, Croatia is very much interested in the EU membership prospects of those countries, Jandroković said after the meeting. Croatia will strongly contribute to those prospects and the aspirants must accept EU values, ensure the rule of law and human and minority rights protection and solve outstanding bilateral issues, he added.

He said that the EU-Western Balkans summit to be held in Zagreb in May should send a clear message that "it pays to implement reforms because that is important for their security, stability and their citizens' living standards, and for us as a neighbouring country, that is very important for security reasons."

Participants in the meeting adopted a joint declaration calling on the European Council to continue supporting the EU membership prospects of the Western Balkans based on the fulfilment of accession criteria and send an unequivocal and positive political message on the launching of accession talks and granting of candidate status.

North Macedonia and Albania are waiting for the launching of accession talks while Bosnia and Herzegovina is waiting for candidate status. Kosovo has signed a Stabilisation and Association Agreement but it still has not submitted a membership application.

The joint declaration also reads that the Western Balkan leaders commit themselves to leading their parliaments on the path of integration and helping create new political momentum in the enlargement process.

Sassoli said that enlargement to Southeast European countries would benefit both those countries and the EU and that it would help in the process of reconciliation in that region. We should urgently give new momentum to the enlargement process by delivering concrete results. The Zagreb summit is expected to have a crucial role in that regard, Sassoli said.

The presidents of the six Western Balkan countries' parliaments will also meet with the working group for the Western Balkans of the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, which is led by Croatian MEP Tonino Picula. The EU remains open to those wishing to join it and to do so, they must meet the set criteria, Picula said, adding that he did not believe that the EU should be reformed before the next enlargement round and that he was confident the two processes could be conducted simultaneously.

