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International Trade

EP gives its consent to CETA

On Wednesday 15 February, MEPs debated and voted on the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). Following a debate that was at times tense and bad-tempered, MEPs voted by 408 votes to 254, with 33 abstentions, to consent to the Agreement. The deal could now provisionally enter into force as early as April, although it requires ratification by Member States according to their constitutional requirements (meaning votes in some national and regional Parliaments) before fully entering into force.

The motion for the EP to give its consent was supported by the EPP, ECR and ALDE Groups. The S&D Group tabled its own motion, still supporting CETA but with an additional focus on transparency, the protection of public services and the protection of workers’ rights. There were also motions tabled by the ENF Group, the Greens/EFA Group, the GUE/NGL Group, and the EFDD Group, all rejecting CETA.

MEPs also voted to give their consent to the EU-Canada Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA). The objective of the SPA is to increase cooperation between the two parties in areas such as research, counter-terrorism, and the fight against organised crime. The SPA is seen as less controversial than CETA, and there were no opposing motions tabled.

Opening remarks

Artis Pabriks (EPP, Latvia), rapporteur for the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, said that the debate marked “judgement day”. In his view, CETA represented a “golden standard” for future trade deals, and he emphasised that the majority of the concerns raised when looking at previous trade deals had been addressed when negotiating CETA. Pabriks also saw the Agreement as a litmus test for EU policies: a decision to be open to the world as opposed to pursuing protectionism and provincialism. Finally, he noted that CETA was not just important from a trade and economic perspective, but also because of its geopolitical aspect. He concluded by calling on his fellow MEPs to vote for the deal. Charles Tannock (ECR, UK), rapporteur for the EU-Canada Strategic Partnership Agreement, shared two extracts from the SPA that he felt illustrated the reasons behind and for the Agreement: namely, ambitious free-trade, multilateralism and liberalism. In Tannock’s view, the merits of these were being questioned, and the EU and likeminded partners had to stand up and fight for them.

Cecilia Malmström, Commissioner for Trade, said that CETA and the SPA presented the opportunity to upgrade the EU-Canada relationship. Turning first to CETA, Malmström described it as a modern, new kind of Agreement that would promote EU values and benefit both citizens and business. She stressed that the Agreement would not affect the safety of food consumed or products purchased; nor would it affect public services or privatise water or healthcare. The SPA was an Agreement that would “accompany and complement” CETA.

Georgi Pirinski (S&D, Bulgaria) then spoke on behalf of the Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) Committee. He recalled that the Committee had provided its Opinion on CETA to the International Trade Committee, and had recommended voting against the Agreement. Bart Staes (Greens/EFA, Belgium) spoke on behalf of the Environment, Public Health and Food


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Safety (ENVI) Committee. He noted that whilst the ENVI Committee had recommended voting for CETA, he personally would be voting against.

**Debate**

**Manfred Weber** (EPP, Germany) gave his support, and that of his Group, to CETA. He then made several party political points, noting that the S&D Group was divided on the deal and calling on the Greens to re-assess their position, aligned as it was with that of the Communists and far-right. Weber said that he respected the rights of national Parliaments, but there had to be “clear responsibilities” in future when discussing international trade agreements. In his view, the EP should have the final word. Looking at the global picture, with Donald Trump in the White House, the EP had to make it clear that they did not want to build walls but bridges. **Gianni Pittella** (S&D, Italy) also mentioned Donald Trump, stating that the new US President had presented “globalisation distorted”. For the S&D Group, CETA was not a model but marked the beginning of a change in EU trade policy. In voting to support it, the Group was voting for change, not for maintaining the status quo. Pittella said that the S&D Group was in favour of a much more progressive, open approach to international trade, on the basis of which future agreements would be forged and created. That meant more transparency in negotiations and a more advanced system of standards.

**Syed Kamall** (ECR, UK) gave his Group’s support to CETA, as it was about new jobs, cheaper prices, more choice for consumers, and more opportunities for small businesses. He acknowledged the concerns of those opposed to international trade, and emphasised the importance of providing support to declining sectors and companies, but said that agreements such as CETA created larger gains that were dispersed across a country or across a group of countries. **Marietje Schaake** (ALDE, the Netherlands) said that her Group had looked at every detail of the Agreement and had also listened to various opinions. Looking at the context in which MEPs were voting, she said that Trump was setting a very clear course for the US, and the EU therefore had to support open cooperation and a strong multilateral system. She called on the EU to take “ambitious steps” forward. In her view, there could be no better trade partner than Canada, the most European country outside Europe.

**Anne-Marie Mineur** (GUE/NGL, the Netherlands), held a pile of papers that she said contained just a few of the signatures of those opposed to CETA. In her view, the EU was putting itself in the hands of multinationals and democracy was at stake. She described CETA as a “threat to all of us”. **Yannick Jadot** (Greens/EFA, France) said that the Agreement had been negotiated by Stephen Harper, former Canadian Prime Minister and a climate sceptic, former Commission President José Barroso, who was now advising Goldman Sachs, and Karel De Gucht, former Trade Commissioner who was now advising multinationals. For Yadot, it was globalisation that explained the victories of the Brexit campaign and Trump, and he said that by agreeing to CETA, the EU was feeding the fire of globalisation that led the extreme-right to power.

**Tiziana Beghin** (EFDD, Italy) said that CETA was not a Free Trade Agreement but institutional reform in hiding, with “numerous secrets”. In her view, what had been promised was unrealistic, and CETA would “seriously affect” EU citizens. **Marine Le Pen** (ENF, France) described CETA as a “terrible Agreement” that would undermine thousands of jobs in Europe.

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In the subsequent debate, the majority of the comments made were on CETA, with little mention of the EU-Canada Strategic Partnership Agreement. In short closing remarks, Malmström emphasised the transparency of CETA negotiations. She said that CETA and the SPA would allow the EU to take a “great economic and geopolitical” opportunity. Pabriks said that, following the vote in the EP, Latvia would be the first national Parliament to ratify CETA in the week to come. Tannock said that both CETA and the SPA would act as future models for trade and political relationships between the EU and third countries. He noted that it could also provide a potential model for the UK’s relationship with the EU post-Brexit.

The following day, on Thursday 16 February, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau addressed MEPs in Strasbourg. Trudeau said that the EU-Canada relationship was founded on common values: democracy, transparency, the rule of law, human rights, inclusion and diversity. In signing CETA, a “very ambitious” project, both parties had showed that they valued trade and the promise of prosperity that came with it. Trudeau emphasised that trade had to work for everyone, and in his view CETA did just that. He said that the EU was a truly remarkable achievement and an unprecedented model for peaceful cooperation. For Canada, an effective EU voice on the global stage was not just preferable but essential, and he said that the whole world benefitted from a strong EU.

2 The full text of Trudeau’s speech is available at http://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2017/02/16/address-prime-minister-justin-trudeau-european-parliament

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Future of the EU

MEPs support reports relating to the future evolution of the Union

On Thursday 16 February, at its plenary session in Strasbourg, Members of the EP gave their backing to three separate reports related to the future evolution of the EU. When taken together, the three reports are being viewed by many MEPs as a clear signal to the Commission that action is required to help the EU face its current challenges and take necessary steps towards a stronger future. The three reports that were put to a vote were on:

1. Possible evolutions of and adjustments to the current institutional set-up of the European Union,³ by Guy Verhofstadt (ALDE, Belgium), which passed by 283 votes to 269 votes with 83 abstentions;
2. Improving the functioning of the European Union building on the potential of the Lisbon Treaty,⁴ by Elmar Brok (EPP, Germany) and Mercedes Bresso (S&D, Italy), which passed by 329 votes to 223 votes with 83 abstentions; and
3. Budgetary capacity for the Eurozone,⁵ by Pervenche Berès (S&D, France) and Reimer Böge (EPP, Germany), which passed by 304 votes to 255 votes with 68 abstentions.

Before the 16 February vote, a discussion on the three reports took place in EP plenary with rapporteurs, the Commission and EP political group representatives on Tuesday 14 February.

Opening remarks

Guy Verhofstadt (ALDE, Belgium) began his remarks by noting that in a few weeks, many European leaders would be visiting Italy to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome. For Verhofstadt, the signing of the Treaty of Rome was the culmination of 10 years’ worth of discussions and hard work among the-then leaders of western European states; discussions and hard work that he wanted to now be replicated once more as the EU sought a brighter future. Verhofstadt noted that all three reports being discussed showed that the Union needed reform once more. For him, the EU was in crisis and lacked friends both at home and abroad. He acknowledged a widespread feeling among European citizens that the Union did “too little too late” and said that this had to be addressed to safeguard the future of the project. Verhofstadt suggested that citizens were not against Europe, but were simply against a Union that didn’t deliver the results that would improve their lives. He went further than this and said that it was clear that citizens in “27 of our 28 Member States”, in fact, wanted more Europe, as this was the only realistic means by which transnational challenges could be tackled. Verhofstadt noted that the EU was facing existential threats to its very existence and cited Brexit, Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin as just three external factors that necessitated all those who believed in the European project to stand together. He said that his report called for a more efficient Union by reducing the size of the Commission, ending Europe “à la carte” and...

⁴ The full Brok/Bresso report can be found here - http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-%F%2FEP%2F%F%FNONSEML%2BCOMPARL%2BPE-573.146%2B01%2BDOD%2BPDF%2BV0%2F%2FEN
⁵ The full Berès/ Böge report can be found here - http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-%F%2FEP%2F%F%FNONSEML%2BCOMPARL%2BPE-582.210%2B01%2BDODO%2BPDF%2BV0%2F%2FEN

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creating a single seat for the European Parliament in Brussels. He said that his report called for a more democratic Union that would overhaul the European electoral process and increase the transparency of Council deliberations. Verhofstadt added that there should not be fighting between the EU and its Member States, but that working together instead with less “national egoism” would help build a better future together. For him, the adoption of all three reports needed to begin a period of “institutional reflection”. This was not a luxury, but an absolute necessity.

Elmar Brok (EPP, Germany) said that European citizens expected solutions from their decision-makers and stressed that the EU must be “greater than the sum of its Member States”. He said that the EU had to deliver against the big challenges that it faced and noted that the Lisbon Treaty already offered the “untapped potential” required to help with this endeavour. Brok said that for too long national politicians had been coming to Council meetings with purely national interests and for too long had simply blamed Brussels for perceived shortcomings that they themselves had contributed to. He said that the EU needed to do more for its citizens and that one way of achieving this would be to take more decisions among Member States by Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) rather than by Unanimity. In Brok’s view, unanimity often stalled much-needed action being taken. Brok also noted that by making more of the Lisbon Treaty, EU Member States could work towards the development of a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the deepening of the European Single Market and the completion of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) that would, in his view, create the jobs and growth that European citizens were demanding from their decision-makers. For Brok, a Europe dominated exclusively by Nation States was “for the past”. Only by being pro-active and pro-European, could EU leaders help build a better future for their citizens.

Pervenche Berès (S&D, France) began by noting that “sometimes history repeats itself and sometimes it disappoints”. She was referring to the fact that this was not the first time that EU decision-makers had explored means of strengthening the Eurozone and stated very clearly that the time had now come to give those Member States that used the Euro as their currency a distinct budget separate from those Member States that did not. Berès said that the Eurozone was “an integrated economic space” but that it was devoid of the tools it required to properly function. She also noted that the UK’s impending withdrawal from the EU could provide the remaining EU27 with an opportunity to come together and strengthen the Eurozone which, for her, ought to be the “strong bedrock” of the EU. To this end, Berès called on the Commission to incorporate measures presented in her report within their future legislative proposals and ahead of an expected White Paper on the future of the EU.

Representing the Commission, Frans Timmermans, First Vice-President for Better Regulation, Interinstitutional Relations, the Rule of Law and the Charter of Fundamental Rights, noted that it was a particular honour for him to be allowed the opportunity to debate a topic that was “in the hearts and minds” of all Europeans. He said that the Commission welcomed the EP’s initiative in trying to build a stronger future and stressed that the entire College had been “closely following” all three reports that were under discussion this morning. To this end, Timmermans made clear that Commission President, Jean-Claude Juncker, was in the process of preparing a White Paper ahead of the Treaty of Rome summit and that he had drawn “information and inspiration” from the work carried out in this field by EP rapporteurs. Timmermans acknowledged that these were turbulent times for the EU and he stated that pursuing policies that “united all Europeans” was the best means of ensuring that the Union not only survived but could look forward to better days ahead. For Timmermans, the EU was an historic achievement of peace, security and prosperity, but he did concede that too many

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citizens had been left behind as the project had evolved. Looking ahead, Timmermans said that during the upcoming Brexit negotiations, it was imperative that central EU values were upheld and he pointed towards a future roadmap – agreed at last year’s informal leaders’ summit in Bratislava – as proof that European decision-makers were committed to better delivering in a whole range of fields. Timmermans said that there was only so much “initiating, proposing, warning or directing” that the Commission could do and that, ultimately, more responsibility had to be taken by those in Strasbourg and Member State capitals. He, therefore, welcomed the Joint Declaration on legislative priorities signed in January by EU Presidents and called on all those who believed in the European project to use their tools, muster political solidarity and deliver.

**Debate**

*Siegfried Mureșan* (EPP, Romania) said that, in light of current challenges, it was important for MEPs to look towards building a better future for the EU. For him, deepening the Single Market and strengthening the EMU were both part of this process and he called on all European decision-makers to put in place measures that increased the resilience of the Eurozone so that crises could be prevented before they occurred rather than simply dealt with in retrospect. Mureșan did, however, say that this had to be done “without taking a single cent more” from EU citizens; many of whom had “lost faith” in the European project.

*Maria João Rodrigues* (S&D, Portugal) noted that it was important to construct an ambitious roadmap for the future of Europe and called on both the Commission to provide this in President Juncker’s White Paper and for Heads of State and Government to support it at the Rome summit. She stressed the importance of not waiting for upcoming national elections in various Member States to have taken place and instead called on action to be taken now. Rodrigues added that the EU was being “existentially challenged” by Presidents Trump and Putin and from within by “nationalistic calls”, including Brexit. In order to deal with this, for Rodrigues, the EU had to assert itself in a political, economic and social capacity and send a message to the world that Europe stood for openness and international cooperation.

*Kazimierz Michal Ujazdowski* (ECR, Poland) said that, unfortunately, the reports under discussion did not provide the answers that the EU sought and suggested that, in fact, they simply proved how out of touch European decision-makers were when it came to judging their citizens’ concerns. For him, it was clear that many European people were “calling for less EU, not more” and that the time had now come to re-distribute the balance of power between Member States and the EU institutions in Brussels. *Charles Goerens* (ALDE, Luxembourg), on the other hand, said that the reports offered “vital ideas” that were required to make collective European progress. He suggested that there were plenty of reasons to look to the future with optimism but did warn that any change in the political structures of the EU would require proper parliamentary scrutiny from the EP. Goerens voiced a “deep-running” concern of his that many Member States were “already or soon to be” in the hands of populists and suggested that this process was taking place because for too long European decision-makers had not put citizens at the heart of their Union.

*Barbara Spinelli* (GUE/NGL, Italy) said that the reports under discussion did not provide any real solutions and she noted that they made a “big error” by not recognising that previously mistakes had been made. For her, the measures outlined were “too technical, too institutional” and would not prove to citizens that their leaders had a realistic understanding of the problems they faced. For Spinelli, doing “more of the same” would not help tackle the challenges
currently faced by the EU. Pascal Durand (Greens/EFA, France) painted a bleak picture of the EU and said, for the first time in its history, the project was in danger of collapsing altogether. He said that Europe was the richest area in the world, yet had experienced “horrible economic problems”, while, at the same time, saw internal political disharmony and “dictators at our doorstep”. Durand added that for too long there had been a democratic deficit in the EU and that the time had now come for a “clear and transparent” Union to improve its public image. He also noted that Member States ought to put aside their national differences and, instead, collectively buy in to a “wide-ranging European agenda”, otherwise the EU would die. Nigel Farage (UK, EFDD) compared the morning’s discussion to a meeting of a “religious sect” who were completely oblivious to the reality that surrounded them. He said that the political realities of 2016 were still being ignored and he warned that MEPs should prepare themselves for the Eurosceptic bandwagon to continue rolling across much of Europe in 2017. Farage stressed that the EU’s form of centralised governance did not work and that those who called for more Europe “fundamentally missed the fundamental point”; European people did not want more EU, they wanted less. He closed with another word of warning; either the EU underwent serious reform or it would not survive. Lastly, Gerolf Annemans (ENF, Belgium) described the EU as an “artificial construct” that had not grown from the people, but rather had been crafted by an elite that sought to principally serve their own self-interest. For him an “unnatural construct brought unnatural effects” and that, while the majority of European decision-makers stood behind federal music and “continued singing the same tune”, they made the mistake of not listening to their audience; something that for the EU “would not end well”.

Closing remarks

Verhofstadt said that he had heard three fundamental criticisms of the EU during the morning’s discussion: firstly, that the EU was too institutional; secondly, that the EU was too big and, thirdly, that measures outlined in the reports were too visionary. Verhofstadt contended, however, that he did not have a desire to create institutions for the sake of it, but that they were the only vehicle through which problems could be solved. On the second criticism, he pointed out that his report called for a smaller Commission, less regulation and simply more policies. On the third comment, Verhofstadt simply said that never before was a need for a common European vision required. Brok dismissed criticisms of his report and said that those on the “extreme left and right” demanded solutions to problems but rejected means to improve the specific instruments required to achieve these. Instead, they simply capitalised on the EU’s problems for their own political gain and, as well as clearly being anti-European, they were also “anti-citizens”, as they offered no effective means of improving the lives of those who they claimed to speak for. Lastly, Berès said that all three reports discussed should be taken together and considered as a signal to the Commission that the status quo was no longer good enough. She said that action was desperately needed to make the Eurozone the “solid base” upon which the EU was built and she added that, in light of Brexit, it was now time for the EU27 Member States to come together and work towards a better future for all Europeans.
**Constitutional Affairs**

*EP’s AFCO Committee discusses UK-EU relations*

On Thursday 9 February, as part of a rolling inquiry on the constitutional relationship of the United Kingdom with the European Union: the consequences of the results of the referendum of 23 June 2016, MEPs on the EP’s Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) Committee held an exchange of views with Kirsty Hughes, Associate Fellow of *Friends of Europe*. Hughes focussed her remarks on Scotland and the possibility of Scotland obtaining a differentiated status and remaining in the Single Market.

Later that day, *Guy Verhofstadt* (ALDE, Belgium), the EP’s Brexit negotiator, addressed MEPs. Verhofstadt referred to recent reports suggesting that the UK Government could trigger Article 50 on Thursday 9 March at the European Council summit. If this was the case, then the European Council would most likely agree its negotiating guidelines at the end of March or on 6-7 April. In order for the European Parliament to influence the European Council guidelines, the EP would have to agree its resolution at the 13-16 March plenary session in Strasbourg. In light of these timings, Verhofstadt was in the process of collecting the views of MEPs. In addition to meeting with the AFCO Committee this week, Verhofstadt would discuss the issue with the Conference of Committee Chairs and Conference of Presidents next week. If Article 50 was triggered later than 9 March, then the EP would agree its resolution at the 3-6 April plenary session. The resolution would be tabled directly in the plenary session, signed by as many political group leaders as possible and also associated with the AFCO Committee Chair. The goal of the resolution was to outline the EP’s main principles and red lines. Before handing over to MEPs, Verhofstadt set out some of his own ideas. In his view, a country could not be better off outside of the EU than within the EU. The withdrawal agreement had to address the financial settlement, the issue of citizens’ rights, the powers of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales in the UK, and security cooperation. Verhofstadt also saw the need for clarity on sequencing; i.e. when negotiations on a future relationship and trade agreement could start. Finally, the talks should also act as a catalyst for the future reform of the EU.

In the subsequent debate, *Ramón Jáuregui Atondo* (S&D, Spain) called for a “cautious” resolution for the outset of the negotiations. In his view, the negotiations had to be two-track: it was crucial to know the destination to know how to get there. He expressed his concern about any agreement on “sub-states” and the political implications for the future organisation of the EU. *Maite Pagazaurtundúa Ruiz* (ALDE, Spain) asked if Verhofstadt thought Article 50 was revocable. She also asked about the economic impact on the EU should there be a failure to reach an agreement.

*Helmut Scholz* (GUE/NGL, Germany) called for the EP to reiterate and commit to EU values in its resolution. *Jacek Saryusz-Wolski* (EPP, Poland) said that it was practically impossible to separate the withdrawal agreement from the future relationship, and in his view, the future relationship was more important than the divorce agreement. He called for the AFET and INTA Committees to be equally involved in work on the withdrawal agreement, given its inseparability from the future agreement. Finally, he asked for the interests of Central and Eastern European countries to be taken into account.

*György Schöpflin* (EPP, Hungary) agreed that security and citizens’ rights were key issues. He called for “enormous emphasis” on the situation in Northern Ireland. Finally, he saw a
major communication problem: how could the EU impact on the thinking in the UK? Schöpflin described the two as “parallel universes”. **Richard Corbett** (S&D, UK) said it was not certain that the Article 50 notification would fully address all of the issues to be negotiated. He suggested that the EP resolution could contain a provision on adequate timing for parliamentary consideration of the final agreement.

**Diane James** (NI, UK) asked Verhofstadt to use his influence to ensure that a future AFCO meeting could hear from either a UK Government representative or someone on the pro-Leave side, to give a more balanced perspective of the situation. **Esteban González Pons** (EPP, Spain) said Brexit should not be used to create a new “à la carte” model for EU membership: no one part of a country could remain in the EU. He said that the EU should neither “sort out” the UK’s problems nor cause more problems for the UK.

In response to comments made, Verhofstadt said that “acquired rights” did not exist in the Treaties. There would exist the rights of EU citizens in the UK and the rights of UK citizens in the EU; for Verhofstadt, reciprocity should be the aim. Finally, he noted that the unity of the EU and the unity of the 27 was a key principle that should be set out in the EP’s resolution.
Other News

**Tusk to seek second term as European Council President**

On Friday 3 February, Donald Tusk confirmed expectations that he would seek re-election for a second term in office as President of the European Council. Tusk was speaking at an informal meeting of EU leaders in Malta at which he stated “after talking to many leaders who expressed their support, I am ready to continue my work”. Tusk noted that his re-election would ultimately depend on the decision of all EU Heads of State or Government, but reports suggest that he has the backing of a range of leaders from different political families and regions within the EU. Tusk took up office on 1 December 2014 and is seeking to be granted another two-and-a-half year term that would see him in post throughout the UK’s EU withdrawal and the next European elections scheduled for May 2019.

**Commission hosts second technical seminar on Article 50**

On Monday 6 February, the European Commission hosted a second technical seminar on the Article 50 negotiations with Member State representatives (excluding the UK), the EP and Council Secretariat. The first such seminar took place in November 2016 and covered five principal areas. The February seminar focussed on issues relating to the financial settlement and the rights of citizens.

**European Public Prosecutor’s Office: no unanimity in Council**

On Tuesday 7 February, the Council formally registered the absence of unanimity in support of the proposed European Public Prosecutor’s office (EPPO). Under the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU), this means that a group of at least nine Member States can now request that the draft Regulation be referred to the European Council for discussion. The European Council would then have four months to try to reach a consensus, and if no consensus can be found, at least nine Member States can pursue the “enhanced cooperation” route. The aim of the Commission proposal is to help to tackle crimes against the EU’s financial interests by introducing a bespoke Office with competence in the field.

**Informal agreement on cross-border portability of online content**

On Tuesday 7 February, Council and EP representatives reached an informal agreement on a Commission proposal to remove barriers to cross-border portability of online content services. The draft Regulation would allow citizens to access already purchased online content services (such as Netflix) when in another EU Member State. The deal will now go to the EP and Member States in Council for formal approval.

**EP’s LIBE Committee agrees Europol Report**

On Thursday 9 February, the EP’s Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) agreed a Report on adding Denmark to the list of third countries and organisations with which Europol can conclude agreements. Although the EP’s Budget (BUDG), Budgetary Control (CONT) and AFCO Committees were asked to give opinions, none of them did so.

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6 See Brussels Bulletin No. 525  
8 For more information, see Brussels Bulletin No. 525

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Juncker will not run for re-election

On Sunday 12 February, Jean-Claude Juncker announced that he will not seek a second term when his five years in office as President of the European Commission expires in 2019. Speaking in Germany, Juncker said his victory in 2014 had been a fine election campaign “but there won’t be a second one because I won’t be putting myself forward as a candidate for a second time”. Juncker also admitted to fearing that Britain’s EU withdrawal negotiations could open up splits among the remaining 27 Member States. Juncker posed the question “do the Hungarians and the Poles want exactly the same thing as the Germans and the French? I have serious doubts”. Juncker added that the British knew “very well” how to achieve disunity among the EU27. In his view, the UK would “promise one thing to State A, another to State B and something else to State C and you end up with no united European front”.

EP’s AFET Committee debates EU-Swiss relations

On Monday 13 February, the EP’s Foreign Affairs (AFET) Committee held an exchange of views on EU-Swiss relations with Jacques de Watteville, Swiss State Secretary and Chief EU Negotiator on institutional issues, and Christian Leffler, European External Action Service (EEAS) Deputy Secretary-General for Global and Economic issues. The discussion covered a wide range of issues, with a particular focus on Swiss immigration laws and the free movement of people, and the EU-Switzerland Institutional Framework under discussion. On the latter, de Watteville said that it was a priority document for the Swiss Authorities. Timing, however, was an issue, with Brexit posing a real problem.

Ombudsman begins fresh inquiry into Barroso job

On Monday 13 February, it was announced that the European Ombudsman had registered a fresh “complaint of maladministration” over the European Commission’s failure to respond to a petition that asked the institution to sanction its former President, Jose Manuel Barroso, for having taken up employment with the US investment bank Goldman Sachs. The petition was initiated by a group of current Commission employees and, to date, has accumulated over 150,000 signatures.

Austrian President addresses EP Plenary

On Tuesday 14 February, Austrian President Alexander Van der Bellen addressed MEPs during the EP’s plenary session in Strasbourg. Van der Bellen was elected president of Austria on 4 December 2016. In his address, Van der Bellen spoke of his upbringing and his belief in the importance, yet also the fragility, of the EU. He called on the younger generation to rebuild the EU and the wider world. Only with the participation of both young and old could the EU continue to exist and tackle the challenges it faced.

Commission proposes change to Comitology Regulation

On Tuesday 14 February, the Commission came forward with a proposal to amend the Comitology Regulation. The Comitology Regulation specifies the process for agreeing implementing acts, and the aim of the change would be to increase transparency about the decisions taken by Member States and to ensure more accountability in the decision-making process. The reason behind the proposal is a number of recent “high profile and sensitive” cases, whereby the lack of a qualified majority for or against a proposal amongst Member

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States has meant that the Commission has had to take a final decision. The changes proposed would address the situation in which Member States are unable, or unwilling, to reach an agreement. The draft Regulation will now be considered by the EP and the Council.

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## Calendar

### Maltese Presidency: forthcoming formal and informal Council meetings (January-June 2017)

- **9-10 March:** European Council
- **22-23 June:** European Council

### Maltese Presidency: forthcoming inter-parliamentary meetings in Valletta and Brussels (January-June 2017)

- **23-24 March:** Chairpersons’ Meeting of the Committees on Social Affairs
- **6-7 April:** Chairpersons’ Meeting of the Economic and Environmental Affairs Committee
- **26-28 April:** Inter-parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)
- **28-30 May:** COSAC Plenary Meeting

### Forthcoming inter-parliamentary Committee meetings (ICMs) in the European Parliament

- **28 February:** ICM: “Reform of the Common European Asylum System” (organised by the EP’s Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee)
- **8-9 March:** ICM on the occasion of the 2017 International Women's Day, on “Women’s Economic Empowerment: Let’s act together” (organised by the EP's Women's Rights and Gender Equality Committee)
- **12 April:** ICM: “The implementation of Treaty provisions concerning national Parliaments” (organised by the EP's Constitutional Affairs Committee)
- **April or May:** ICM: “The future of regional policy after 2020” (organised by the EP's Regional Development Committee)
- **June (tbc):** ICM: “State of play of the CFSP/CSDP” (organised by the EP’s Foreign Affairs Committee)

**Alison Groves**
agrovesa@parliament.uk; alison.groves@natparl.ep.europa.eu

**Fraser McIntosh**
m McIntoshf@parliament.uk; fraser.mcintosh@natparl.ep.europa.eu

House of Commons, UK National Parliament Office, Brussels
00 32 2 284 3703/4656 (Brussels) (#6 24 3703/4656 from Westminster)
00 33 3 88 17 6846/6842 (Strasbourg) (#6 23 6846/6842 from Westminster)
Mobile: 00 32 486 646948 / 0032 486 646949

Website: [www.parliament.uk/npo](http://www.parliament.uk/npo)

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