

## Netherlands takes over EU Council Presidency

The Netherlands has taken over the six-month rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union, starting on 1 January 2016. The Dutch Presidency is the first Presidency in the Trio programme of the Netherlands, Slovakia and Malta. The 'trio' sets long-term goals and prepares a common agenda for the Council for the next 18 months. Covering the period between January 2016 and June 2017, the [current work programme](#) is based on the recent European Council conclusions and strategic agenda. As EU Presidency holder, the Netherlands' guiding principles are a Union that focuses on the essentials, a Union that focuses on growth and jobs through innovation, and a Union that connects with civil society. The Netherlands will be focusing on four priority areas:

1. Migration and international security
2. Sound finances and a robust eurozone
3. Europe as an innovator and job creator
4. Forward-looking climate and energy policy

(Source: [Netherlands EU Presidency](#))

## EU Referendum update

Consensus is growing among pro- and anti-EU campaigners that the referendum on Britain's membership of the bloc will not be held until September, amid signs that a deal on David Cameron's reform proposals will be delayed until March. As the prime minister faced calls from Viktor Orbán, his Hungarian counterpart, to alter his proposal to ban EU citizens from claiming in-work benefits for four years, sources on both sides played down the prospect of a deal by No 10's preferred date of February. The two camps agree that more work will need to be done to address concerns in eastern and central Europe that the benefits proposal is discriminatory. A failure to reach a deal at an EU summit next month would push the negotiations to the annual spring European council in mid-March, making September the earliest date that a referendum could be held. At least 16 weeks have to elapse between the conclusion of the negotiations and the referendum

to allow for the passage, over a period of four to six weeks, of secondary legislation setting the rules of the campaign.

### Ministers get free vote

David Cameron is to allow ministers to campaign for either side in the referendum once a deal is reached on the UK's relationship with the EU. He said the UK government would make a recommendation to the British people on which way to vote in the referendum. But he told MPs "it will be open to individual ministers to take a different, personal decision while remaining part of the government". A number of cabinet ministers are thought to favour an out vote, with Mr Cameron expected to campaign for Britain to remain in the EU, although he has said he rules nothing out if he does not get what he wants from his renegotiations. (Source: [The Guardian](#), [BBC](#))



## Cameron Brexit proposals get mixed reception in Berlin and Budapest

Prime Minister David Cameron won support from German Chancellor Angela Merkel for EU reforms of European welfare systems, arguing that what is good for Britain is also good for Europe. David Cameron is seeking backing for his demands for EU reforms, which he is battling to secure before Britain's referendum on membership in the 28-nation bloc by the end of 2017. Speaking in southern Germany, where he held talks with the Christian Social Union - sister party of Angela Merkel's CDU - Cameron said

he was "even more confident after the discussions here that these (reforms) are possible and not just good for Britain but actually good for Europe". David Cameron wants the EU to cut bureaucracy and shift more powers from Brussels to member states. He is also seeking guarantees that Britain will be protected from closer EU political integration and from economic decisions made by the 19 EU members that use the euro currency. However, a key sticking point for several EU members is David Cameron's aim to restrict benefits for EU migrants for their first four years in Britain. Critics of the plan say the measure would harm the EU's central tenets of non-discrimination between EU citizens and freedom of movement between member states. In Hungary, David Cameron won broad backing from Hungarian counterpart Viktor Orban for his EU reform proposals - but not for his idea to freeze welfare benefits for EU migrants in Britain.

(Source: [Euractiv](#))



## ACEA – CV registrations +17.8% in November

Figures released by the European Automobile and Manufacturers Association (ACEA) show that demand for new commercial vehicles in the EU increased (+17.8%) for the eleventh consecutive month, totalling 179,930 units in November 2015. Growth was sustained across all commercial vehicle segments. Spain (+52.2%) and Italy (+28.4%) confirmed the positive momentum by showing significant growth, followed by Germany (+14.9%), the UK (+14.3%) and France (+5.6%). Over eleven months in 2015, the EU market expanded (+12.2%), totalling 1,887,274 commercial vehicles. During the same period, Spain (+37.9%), the UK (+16.4%), Italy (+11.9%), Germany (+3.9%) and France (+2.4%) all posted growth.

(Source: [ACEA](#))

## Germany encouraged to support Commission's toll proposals

Transport Commissioner Violeta Bulc wants to put an end to the EU's various toll schemes, and has rejected German Minister for Transport Alexander Dobrindt's proposed plans on the matter. Violeta Bulc told [Die Welt](#) that it is possible that the European Commission will present proposals this year that could serve "as the basis for a European toll system for trucks and cars". Therefore, EU member states that have opted to toll their roadways would be organised into one single system. Germany has had its toll scheme rejected by the Commission in the past, which cited unacceptable discrimination against non-German citizens. According to Berlin's plans, Germans would receive discounts when using tolled roadways. The Commission formally launched an infringement procedure against Germany on 18 June last year. Due to the ongoing disagreement, Dobrindt's plan, which was to have been implemented early this year, has now been postponed indefinitely.

(Source: [Euractiv](#))

---

## Week ahead

### European Parliament

Monday 11 January

- ITRE – Exchange of views with Commissioner for Climate Action & Energy (COP21)

Tuesday 14 January

- IMCO – Public hearing on Non-Tariff Barriers to Trade in the Internal Market; Non-Tariff Barriers in the Single Market
- ENVI – Exchange of views with Minister for Infrastructure and the Environment, Dutch Presidency