

Wednesday, 1st June 2022

Minister Giró meets with the EIB Vice-President to finalise an operation that will permit the expansion of the Fira de Barcelona

- **The European Investment Bank (EIB) enters into a 110 million euros loan with Fira 2000 to expand the Gran Via site**
- **The project is expected to start up next year, with an estimated total cost of 234 million euros**

The Minister of Economy and Finance, Jaume Giró, met with the Vice-President of the European Investment Bank (EIB), Ricardo Mourinho, to finalise a 110 million euros loan granted to the company Fira 2000 SA to finance part of the budget for the expansion of the Gran Via site. This loan, endorsed by the Government of Catalonia, was part of the financial plan signed in 2019 by the six institutions that make up the company Fira 2000 SA.

Minister Giró stressed that the signing of this deal, **“is an unequivocal demonstration of the confidence of the EIB, one of the most important financial institutions in Europe, in the solidity of the Catalan economy, and in a growing project such as the Fira de Barcelona”**. The commitment to the Fira de Barcelona is a plan for Catalonia’s present and future, according to the Minister of Economy, **“as shown by exhibitions such as the recently held ISE or the MWC, which put Barcelona and Catalonia on the world map as references in leading areas such as the technology and digital sectors”**.

For his part, the Vice President of the EIB, **Ricardo Mourinho Félix**, said, **“We are pleased to finance Fira 2000 in the project to expand its Gran Via venue into a state-of-the-art trade fair complex in Europe such as the Fira de Barcelona. This agreement shows the EIB’s firm commitment to innovation, as well as our fruitful collaboration with the Government of Catalonia in projects that create new jobs and new sustainable infrastructures”**

The Financial Plan

In 2019, the six institutions that are part of the Fira 2000 (the Government of Catalonia, the municipalities of Barcelona and L’Hospitalet, the Metropolitan Area of Barcelona, the Provincial Council of Barcelona and the Chamber of Barcelona) approved the financial plan for the expansion of the Gran Via complex and the remodelling of Montjuïc. The draft sets out the financing instruments and financial commitments to be undertaken by each of the parties. This plan will involve an investment of 367 million euros (234 million euros for the expansion of the Gran Via fairgrounds and 133 million euros for the refurbishment of the Montjuïc fairgrounds). The works are scheduled to begin next year, so that by 2026, the Gran Via construction site can be inaugurated. The Montjuïc work will begin in 2029, coinciding with the centenary of the Universal Exhibition of 1929.

To finance this large fairground infrastructure project, Fira 2000 will turn to external borrowing. Thus, according to the financial plan, in addition to the 110 million euros signed with the EIB, Fira 2000 also plans to request financing through the bank and eventually a potential second loan from the EIB. In addition, the Government of Catalonia and the municipalities of Barcelona and L'Hospitalet will negotiate with the European Union regarding the possibility of obtaining 30 million euros of European funds.

Other operations with the EIB

During the meeting to finalise the financing operation, the Minister of Economy and Finance and the Vice-President of the EIB also discussed other operations between the Government of Catalonia and the European Bank that are currently on the table or under study in areas such as railway infrastructure, science and technology, the water cycle and operational programmes financed by European structural funds, among others.

Improving the Government of Catalonia's ranking

The signing of this loan is part of a focused effort to improve the credit quality rating of the Government of Catalonia by two of the main international agencies, Fitch and DBRS Morningstar. Last July, Fitch Ratings raised the ranking of the Government of Catalonia from BB to BBB-, with a stable outlook and a degree of investment. And in March of this year, DBRS Morningstar also improved the ranking of Catalonia to BBB with a stable trend, in degree of investment. The Government of Catalonia had not had the investment grade rating of two international agencies for 10 years. Likewise, in November 2021, the Government of Catalonia obtained an A2 rating in the sustainability ranking awarded by VIGEO-EIRIS, the second best of a 12-point scale, according to the agency's methodology.