



General Affairs Council **Tuesday 13 October, Luxembourg**

Chair: Michael Roth, Germany's Minister of State for Europe

The meeting will start at 10.00.

The presidency, in public session, will brief ministers on the state of play regarding the next multiannual financial framework and the recovery package.

The Union's chief negotiator, Michel Barnier, will inform ministers of the state of play of the **EU-UK negotiations** and the implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement.

Ministers will prepare for the meeting of the **European Council on 15 and 16 October** by discussing draft conclusions.

They will exchange views on the annual **Rule of Law Dialogue**.

There will be an information point from the presidency about the **Conference on the Future of Europe**.

The Council is expected to adopt without discussion a recommendation on a coordinated approach to the restriction of free movement in response to the **COVID-19 pandemic**.

A presidency press conference will be held at the end of the meeting.

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[General Affairs Council meeting page](#)
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¹ This note has been drawn up under the responsibility of the press office.

Next multiannual financial framework (MFF) and the recovery package

The presidency will brief ministers on the trilateral contacts held with the European Parliament and the Commission following the special European Council meeting of 17-21 July 2020.

The aim of the political dialogue with the Parliament and the Commission is to secure the required consent of the European Parliament on the MFF regulation.

Seven meetings at political level have taken place so far in this dialogue. The discussions have focused on new own resources, the governance of Next Generation EU, the envelopes of EU programmes, and horizontal issues such as climate, gender and biodiversity.

On 12 October, the first trilogue will take place with the European Parliament on the regulation on a conditionality regime linked to the EU budget, proposed by the Commission in 2018 as part of the MFF package. This regulation is a legislative act to be adopted pursuant to the ordinary legislative procedure. The Council's mandate for negotiations with the Parliament was agreed on 30 September.

At their meeting in July, EU leaders defined the parameters of a comprehensive package of €1 824.3 billion, which combines the next multiannual financial framework – €1 074.3 billion – and a new temporary recovery instrument, Next Generation EU, with financial firepower of €750 billion.

The presidency's aim is to **finalise all the procedures as soon as possible** in order to ensure a timely start for the programmes that will support the EU's strategic objectives, including the green and digital transitions, and the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.

- [Special European Council, 17-21 July 2020](#)
- [Regulation on a general regime of conditionality for the protection of the Union budget - Council position](#)
- [Long-term EU budget 2021-2027 \(background information\)](#)
- [Negotiating the EU long-term budget \(background information\)](#)

EU-UK negotiations

The Union's chief negotiator, Michel Barnier, will inform ministers of the **state of play of the EU-UK negotiations** and the implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement.

The **9th round** of negotiations took place in Brussels from 29 September to 2 October, with significant differences remaining on key issues.

President Ursula von der Leyen and Prime Minister Boris Johnson **spoke on 3 October** and agreed that some progress had been made in recent weeks but that important gaps remained, notably –but not only – in the areas of fisheries, the level playing field and governance. They underlined that work should intensify in order to bridge these gaps.

The EU remains concerned about the **UK Internal Market Bill** and insists on the removing of problematic clauses that are in breach of the Withdrawal Agreement, which was ratified by both sides and entered into force on 1 February 2020.

The EU had urged the UK government to amend the bill by the end of September. On 1 October, the European Commission sent a letter of formal notice to the UK for breaching its obligations under the Withdrawal Agreement, marking the beginning of a formal **infringement process** against the UK. The Commission stressed that it would continue working towards a full and timely implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement. These efforts run in parallel to the negotiations to reach a trade deal with the UK.

After the General Affairs Council, EU-UK relations will be discussed by the EU leaders at the **European Council of 15-16 October 2020**.

The **transition period** ends on 31 December 2020.

- [Statement by Michel Barnier following round 9 of negotiations, 2 October 2020](#)

- [Joint Statement by the President von der Leyen and Prime Minister Boris Johnson, 3 October 2020](#)
- [Opening of infringement process against the United Kingdom, 1 October 2020](#)
- [EU-UK negotiations on the future relationship \(background information\)](#)

October European Council

The Council will examine **draft conclusions** for the European Council meeting to be held on 15 and 16 October.

EU leaders will meet in Brussels to discuss the state of play of EU-UK negotiations and consider the way forward.

They will hold an orientation debate on climate change.

EU leaders will also hold a discussion on **COVID-19** coordination.

Relations with **Africa** will be on the agenda; other foreign policy issues may be addressed too.

[European Council on 15-16 October 2020](#)

Rule of Law Dialogue

The German presidency introduced a **new approach** to the Council's annual rule of law dialogue, which is intended to make the dialogue stronger and more structured, while fully respecting the principles of objectivity, non-discrimination and equal treatment of all member states.

Under this approach, the dialogue will be organised into two different types of political discussions: a **horizontal discussion** covering general rule-of-law developments in the EU; and **country-specific discussions** addressing key developments one by one in each member state.

At the October GAC, ministers will have their first horizontal discussion, which will cover general rule-of-law developments, along four pillars: justice systems; the anti-corruption framework; media pluralism; and other institutional issues. One of the elements under discussion will be the first **rule of law report**, recently issued by the European Commission.

Country-specific aspects will only be discussed at the 10 November GAC meeting. There, the discussion will focus on key developments in five member states, following the EU protocol order: Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark and Estonia.

This strengthened approach to the dialogue is part of the Council's efforts to further improve rule of law in all member states, within the framework of the 2014 Council conclusions that established the dialogue.

This new approach is expected to continue to be followed in the coming years: in future future, the horizontal discussions could take place once a year during the second semester, while the country-specific discussions could take place each semester, following the protocol order.

[First Annual Report on the Rule of Law situation across the European Union, 30 September 2020 \(European Commission\)](#)

Conference on the Future of Europe

There will be an information point from the presidency about the **Conference on the Future of Europe**.

Member states want the Conference on the Future of Europe to get citizens involved in a wide-ranging debate on Europe's future in the coming decade and beyond, including in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

On 24 June 2020, EU ambassadors agreed the **Council's position** on the arrangements for the conference, which paves the way for the opening of discussions on this topic with the Commission and the European Parliament.

In its mandate, the Council takes the view that the conference should be launched as soon as the epidemiological conditions allow for it. It should focus on how to develop EU policies over the medium and long term in order to tackle more effectively the challenges facing Europe, including the economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic and lessons learned from the crisis.

[Council's position on the Conference on the Future of Europe, 24 June 2020](#)

COVID-19 coordination

The Council is expected to adopt without discussion a recommendation on a coordinated approach to the restriction of free movement in response to the **COVID-19 pandemic**.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, member states have adopted a number of measures to protect public health, some of which have had an impact on citizens' right to move and reside freely within the EU. Decisions on whether to introduce such restrictions remains the responsibility of member states. However, a coordinated approach is essential to avoid fragmentation and disruption and to ensure transparency and predictability for citizens and businesses.

To this end, discussions have taken place within the Council on the text of a draft Council recommendation, on the basis of a Commission proposal of 4 September 2020. The draft recommendation to be covered by ministers includes a number of elements:

- general principles to be taken into account when coordinating measures, including those of proportionality and non-discrimination
- common criteria to be taken into account, including the following key criteria: 14-day cumulative COVID-19 case notification rate, test positivity rate and testing rate
- mapping of risk areas by region, to be published by the ECDC
- common thresholds when considering restrictions
- a common framework as regards possible measures
- information between member states and communication to the public

[COVID-19: travel and transport \(background information\)](#)