Council of the European Union

**PRESS**

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**BACKGROUND BRIEF**[1]
Brussels, 20 November 2020

# Video conference of the development ministers
# 23 November 2020

The video conference of the EU development ministers will be chaired by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep **Borrell**, starting at **15.00**.

Ministers will engage in forward-thinking discussions on two main topics: **gender equality and women's empowerment** and **debt relief.**

As first agenda item, ministers will discuss how to work more closely together to promote **gender equality and women's empowerment** in all external action in view of the upcoming adoption of the **"EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III".**

In the context of the **COVID-19 global response and recovery effort**, ministers will then hold an exchange of views on **linking debt relief and investments** to the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).** This discussion should encompass the role for "Team Europe" in supporting and complementing work at the multilateral level, and exploring the possible basis for a **Global Recovery Initiative** to better support partner countries.
Commissioners Urpilainen and Gentiloni will participate in the discussion, together with the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, Kristalina Georgieva and the Chair of the Paris Club, Emmanuel Moulin. The Presidents of the European Investment Bank Hoyer and of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Renaud-Basso, will also join the meeting.

Under Any Other Business, ministers will be informed about the state of play of negotiations on the **post-Cotonou agreement** and the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (**NDICI**). The prospects of EU development cooperation in **Tanzania** will also be touched upon.

In connection with the video conference, the Council is due to approve **conclusions on Team Europe** and on the **Court of Auditors' Special Report No. 14/2020 on EU Development Aid to Kenya**.

- Public session at 15.45 on NDICI

Video conference of development ministers, meeting page

Press conferences and public events via video streaming

Video coverage of the event in broadcast quality (MPEG4) and photo gallery

[1] This note has been drawn up under the responsibility of the Council press office.

## Gender equality and empowerment in external action

Under the first agenda item, ministers will have the opportunity to discuss ways in which the EU and its member states can **contribute to strengthen the role of women in external action**, also in view of the forthcoming Joint Communication on the “EU Gender Action Plan (GAP) III: An Ambitious Agenda for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in EU External Action”.

The **Council Conclusions** of 25 November 2019 on the **implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan II in 2018** noted that further improvements were needed to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment globally, and therefore invited the Commission to present a renewed ambitious Action Plan encompassing gender equality in all EU external action.

Building on the Commission’s two previous gender action plans, the **EU Gender Action Plan III** - which is expected to be adopted on 24 November 2020 - will cover the 2021-2025 period and reaffirm that **gender equality and empowerment** of women and girls is a **key priority of the EU’s external action** and will help to further align the EU with its **international commitments**.

2020 marks 25 years since the adoption of the **1995 Beijing Declaration on Women’s Rights and its Platform for Action**, the most comprehensive global agenda to date for achieving gender equality as well as the **20th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325** on Women, Peace and Security.

Gender equality & women’s rights worldwide – 2021-25 action plan

Implementation of the EU Gender Action Plan II in 2018: Strengthening gender equality and women’s empowerment in EU external action - Council conclusions (25 November 2019)

EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020

## Debt Sustainability and debt relief

Under the second agenda item, Ministers will engage in a **broad reflection on linking debt relief and investments in low income countries to the SDGs, a new model of sustainable financing for development,** to address the cycle of over-indebtedness affecting low-income countries, especially in Africa.

Ministers will be in particular invited to reflect on how best to **align** debt relief efforts with the SDGs and how to **coordinate**, in a full **Team Europe spirit,** the work of the EU, its member states, and European Development Finance Institutions when it comes to debt relief and sustainable recovery. They will also provide guidance in the specific areas in which the EU could further strengthen its **cooperation with the IMF** at country level.

Commissioners **Gentiloni** and **Urpilainen**, together with International Monetary Fund Managing Director **Georgieva** and the Chair of the Paris Club **Moulin,** will inform ministers of ongoing efforts at multilateral level and possible next steps.

The European Investment Bank (**EIB**) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (**EBRD**) will also participate in the meeting.

Debt issues were at the top of the agenda of this autumn’s IMF/World Bank Group Annual Meetings. For many low-income countries, pre-pandemic debt levels were already worrisome; the **COVID19 crisis has exacerbated debt vulnerabilities** and is leading to rising poverty and inequalities.

The discussion takes place in the context of **ongoing international efforts**. At the October G20 Finance Ministers' and Central Bank Governors' meeting, the EU supported the extension of the **G20/Paris Club Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI)** until at least June 2021, as well as a more structural approach for countries that are experiencing solvency distress and need deeper debt restructuring. This new 'Common Framework' will ensure strong creditors' coordination and facilitate timely and orderly debt treatment for DSSI-eligible countries, with broad creditor participation including the private sector. This will also ensure fair burden sharing among all official bilateral creditors, and between private and official creditors. As a full member of the G20, the EU has taken an active role in negotiating and brokering agreement on this new debt restructuring framework which is an important deliverable of the G20 Summit this week-end.

On 8 April 2020, the EU launched "Team Europe" package to **support partner countries in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic and its consequences**. The objective of the "Team Europe" approach is to combine resources from the EU, its Member States, and financial institutions, in particular the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

"Team Europe" global response to COVID-19: Council welcomes the mobilisation of almost €36 billion and approves conclusions, Press Release (8 June 2020)

Coronavirus: European Union launches "Team Europe" package to support partner countries with more than €20 billion

COVID 19: Debt Service Suspension Initiative, June 19 2020 (The World Bank Website)

## Other issues

Commissioner Urpilainen will inform ministers on the latest **state of play regarding negotiations on the post-Cotonou Agreement** and the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (**NDICI**). The latter will be a public session and, as such, webstreamed.

The negotiations on **the Post-Cotonou Agreement** are in the final stage and Post Cotonou will be a modern and comprehensive agreement that will provide the basis for future relations between the EU and ACP partner countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

At the request of the Swedish delegation, ministers will touch upon the prospects of EU development cooperation in **Tanzania**.

In connection with the video conference the Council is expected to approve **conclusions on Team Europe** and **Council Conclusions on the Court of Auditors' Special Report No. 14/2020 on EU Development Aid to Kenya** by written procedure.