



Informal video conference of Environment ministers
Brussels, 18 March 2021

Chair: João Pedro Matos Fernandes, Portuguese Minister for the Environment and Climate Action

European Commission representatives: Executive Vice-President of the Commission **Frans Timmermans** and Commissioner **Virginijus Sinkevičius**

Starting time: 09:30

This first informal video conference of European environment ministers under the Portuguese Presidency will be held in public session. As the ministers are meeting virtually, no formal decisions will be made during the videoconference.

Ministers will start their discussions with an exchange of views on the **EU strategy on adaptation to climate change**. The strategy, outlines a long-term vision for the EU to become a climate-resilient society that is fully adapted to the unavoidable impacts of climate change by 2050. Guidance provided by ministers will serve as input for draft Council conclusions.

Ministers will then hold an exchange of views on the role of the Recovery and Resilience Facility in the context of **greening the European Semester**. The European Semester is an essential instrument for the coordination of economic policies across the EU. The Recovery and Resilience Facility is one of the main tools for European recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic, and is designed to support the green and digital transition. Ministers will discuss how these two instruments can complement each other.

Environment ministers will continue with a policy debate on a legislative proposal on batteries and waste batteries that aims to strengthen and align the current EU batteries legislation with the European Green Deal.

Under any other business, ministers will exchange views on Council conclusions on the EU chemicals strategy for sustainability and on a mandate to start negotiations with the European Parliament on the 8th Environment Action Programme, both approved ahead of the video conference.

The Presidency will inform ministers on the state of play of the negotiations between the Council and the European Parliament on the European climate law. The primary aim of the European climate law is to set into legislation the objective of a climate neutral EU by 2050.

The European Commission will inform delegations on the upcoming Forest Strategy, a key action under the European Green Deal. Ministers will also receive information on the Commission's newly adopted trade policy review that, for the first time, has an important sustainability angle.

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

Press conference: at the end of the meeting +/- 18:00

[Environment Council meeting page](#)

[Press conferences and public events by video streaming](#)

[Video coverage in broadcast quality \(MPEG4\) and photo gallery](#)

EU strategy on adaptation to climate change

Ministers will start their discussions with an exchange of views on the EU strategy on adaptation to climate change.

The Commission published its Communication on a new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change on 24 February, as part of the actions laid down in the European Green Deal.

The strategy outlines a long-term vision for the EU to become a climate-resilient society that is fully adapted to the unavoidable impacts of climate change by 2050. Even with our efforts to become climate neutral by 2050, global greenhouse gas emissions will continue to rise in the coming decades and average global temperatures will climb. This will increase the risk of more frequent extreme weather events - like heatwaves, droughts or floods - and coastal erosion from rising sea levels. These impacts will affect everyone and call for adequate adaptation measures that complement actions undertaken to prevent and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Building on the 2013 climate adaptation strategy, the new strategy aims to deepen and expand adaptation actions, with a strengthened focus on financial and economic considerations, the international dimension and the role of insurance. It also aims to align its objectives with international developments, in particular the Paris Agreement, which established adaptation as a global goal and highlighted it as a key contributor to sustainable development.

The strategy has three main objectives: to make adaptation smarter, swifter and more systemic. It also aims at stepping up international action on adaptation to climate change. These objectives are underpinned by 14 actions and steps to be taken to deliver them.

The discussion between ministers will be a first exchange of views at high level on this important topic. The guidance provided by ministers will provide valuable input for the preparation of draft Council conclusions, in view of the Environment Council in June 2021.

The debate will be structured around three questions prepared by the Presidency:

- Which elements of the new EU adaptation strategy are the most relevant in order to advance the implementation of adaptation and improvement of resilience in your own country and to contribute also to EU level support for local action?
- Which of the novelties (e.g. international focus; insurance; financial and economic considerations) presented in the new EU adaptation strategy would you consider to be most helpful in advancing an EU-wide positive narrative towards climate-resilient EU societies?

[Commission Communication on a new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change](#) + [ADD1](#) + [ADD2](#)

[Commission communication on 'Stepping up Europe's 2030 climate ambition'](#) + [ADD 1](#), [ADD 2](#), [ADD3](#), [ADD 4](#)

[Climate change: what the EU is doing](#) - background information

Greening the European Semester

Ministers will hold an exchange of views on the role of the Recovery and Resilience Facility in the context of **greening the European Semester**.

The European Semester is an essential instrument for the coordination of economic policies across the EU. It has four dimensions: macroeconomic stability, environmental sustainability, productivity and fairness.

The Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) is one of the main tools for European recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. The €672.5 billion facility is at the heart of the EU's extraordinary recovery effort, Next Generation EU - the €750 billion plan agreed by EU leaders in July 2020. The RRF, among other things, promotes the green and digital transition.

The Commission presented the 2021 Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy on 17 September 2020, launching this year's European Semester cycle. This also sets out guidance for the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility. Among other things, member states should ensure that their National Recovery and Resilience Plans are in line with the priorities of the Green Deal and that they focus on investments and reforms that support the climate transition. Each National Recovery and Resilience Plan should spend at least 37% in measures that effectively contribute to the green transition, including biodiversity, or to addressing the challenges resulting therefrom.

Ministers will discuss the interlinkages between these two instruments in a debate structured around questions from the Presidency:

- Will the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Plans be sufficient to ensure a Green transition? How could they be reinforced (namely bearing in mind the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework)?
- Which should be the guiding principles of this transition and among those, which ones should be seen as priority for the European Semester?
- What further efforts should be pursued to facilitate a structural greening of the Semester in the near future?

[A recovery Plan for Europe](#) - background information

[Greening the European Semester](#) - background information

Batteries and waste batteries

Environment ministers will hold a policy debate on batteries and waste batteries. On 10 December, the European Commission presented a proposal to update EU legislation on batteries and waste batteries.

Batteries are a key element of the clean energy transition. In the EU, transport is responsible for roughly a quarter of greenhouse gas emissions and the main cause of air pollution in cities. A more widespread uptake of electric vehicles is expected to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and noxious emissions from road transport.

The proposal aims to reduce the environmental and social impacts of batteries throughout all stages of the battery life cycle - from sourcing materials to production, use, recycling and disposal. Thereby it aligns the current legislation with the European Green Deal, promotes circular economy and aims to ensure a high level of protection of health and the environment. The proposal also aims to address discrepancies on the internal market due to uneven rules and information, by creating a level playing field for batteries through a common, clearer set of rules.

In an effort to seek political guidance on the way forward and on the main priorities for member states, ministers are invited to exchange views on the proposal.

The Presidency has presented three questions to steer the debate:

- Considering the subject matter and the objectives of the proposed regulation, what is your position regarding the choice of an internal market legal basis and the scope of the proposal?
- Taking into account the objective of reducing environmental and social impacts throughout all stages of the battery lifecycle, do you consider the proposed sustainability and safety requirements and the due diligence provisions, their timelines and the methods established for their progressive evolution to be adequate?
- As the promotion of the circular economy, including the second life of batteries, is at the core of the proposed regulation, do you consider the level of ambition and the timelines set out for the targets for collection and recycling of batteries to be appropriate? Moreover, do you agree that in order to promote a well-functioning internal market for recycling services and secondary raw materials related to batteries and waste batteries, further alignment of extended producer responsibility schemes is required?

[Commission proposal for a regulation on batteries and waste batteries](#) + [ADD 1](#)

Any other business

8th Environment Action Programme

Under any other business, Environment ministers will discuss the 8th Environment Action Programme (EAP) that will serve as an overarching guide to European environmental policy until 2030. Environment action programmes have led the development of EU environment policy since the early 1970s. The proposal for a Decision on the 8th EAP, presented by the Commission on 14 October, aims at accelerating the green transition in a just and inclusive way. It builds upon the European Green Deal and the list of actions detailed in it. Ambassadors of EU member states approved on 17 March a mandate that will serve as the Council's position to start negotiations with the European Parliament on the 8th EAP. Among other things, as the 8th EAP runs until 2030, member states added provisions regarding the need to define further actions when the European Green Deal's key actions have been put in place by 2024.

[Press release on the 8th Environment Action Programme"](#)

European Climate Law

The Presidency will inform ministers on the state of play of the trilogue negotiations between the European Parliament and the Council on the proposal for a European Climate Law.

The aim of the European climate law is to set into legislation the objective of a climate neutral EU by 2050. On 17 December, EU environment ministers reached a general approach on the Commission proposal for a European climate law, including a new EU greenhouse gas emissions reduction target of at least 55% by 2030, following the guidance of the European Council, given on 11 December. The general approach constitutes the Council's negotiation mandate in the trilogue meetings with Parliament.

The Council and the European Parliament have so far held four trilogue meetings in view of reaching a political agreement, and are currently preparing for a fifth one.

[Press release on the Council general approach on the European Climate law](#)

EU chemicals strategy for sustainability

The Presidency will inform ministers on the approval of Council conclusions on a Sustainable Chemicals Strategy of the Union: Time to Deliver.

The Council on 12 March approved conclusions on a new chemicals strategy setting a long-term vision for the EU chemicals policy. The strategy aims to achieve a toxic-free environment with a higher level of protection of human health and the environment, while strengthening the competitiveness of the EU's chemicals industry. In its conclusions, the Council asks the Commission to implement the actions laid down in the strategy, as soon as possible, including targeted amendments to streamline EU chemicals legislation, substituting and minimising substances of concern, and phasing out the most harmful chemicals for non-essential societal uses.

[Press release on Council conclusions on EU chemicals strategy for sustainability](#)

United Nations Environment Assembly meeting

The Commission and the Presidency will update ministers on the fifth meeting of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-5) held in Nairobi on 22 and 23 February 2021.

EU forest strategy

The Commission will inform ministers about the state of play of the EU forest strategy, currently under preparation. Under the European Green Deal, the Commission has announced a new EU forest strategy that will build on its biodiversity strategy, cover the whole forest cycle and promote the many services forests provide. The strategy will aim to ensure healthy, resilient forests that contribute to biodiversity, climate goals and secure livelihoods, and that support a circular bio-economy. The Commission plans to adopt the strategy in 2021.

[EU forest strategy policy page](#)

Trade policy review

The Commission will inform ministers on its recently adopted Communication on trade policy review. The trade policy review has the European Green Deal at its core. This is the first time the Commission puts sustainability at the heart of trade policy, in an effort to making a contribution to the green and digital transformation of economies.

[Commission Communication Trade Policy Review - An Open, Sustainable and Assertive Trade Policy](#) +[ADD 1](#)
