



Informal video conference of European affairs ministers Tuesday 23 March 2021

Chair: Ana Paula Zacarias, State Secretary for European Affairs of Portugal

The meeting will start at 10.00.

Ministers will prepare the video conference of the members of the European Council on 25-26 March 2021.

They will exchange views on the synthesis report on Council contributions on the 2021 European Semester and draft a recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area. The Presidency will present an updated roadmap on the 2021 European Semester.

The Presidency will inform ministers about the Conference on the Future of Europe.

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

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[*Informal video conference of European affairs ministers, 23 March 2021 meeting page*](#)

[*Press conferences by video streaming*](#)

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

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

Video conference of the members of the European Council

Ministers will examine draft statement for the video conference of the members of the European Council on 25 and 26 March. The EU leaders will discuss the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Single Market, industrial policy, digital transformation and the economy, the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean, and relations with Russia.

- COVID-19: The EU leaders will take stock of the roll-out of vaccines and the epidemiological situation and pursue the coordinated response to the pandemic crisis.
- Single market, industrial policy, digital transformation and the economy: They will discuss the key priorities for the single market, industrial policy and the digital transformation. The leaders will look at the Digital Compass, including targets set for 2030, and review work on digital taxation. They will address the priorities for the 2021 European Semester and leaders will be invited to endorse the recommendation on the economic policy of the eurozone.
- Eastern Mediterranean: The EU leaders will discuss the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean. The High Representative and the Commission are expected to submit a report on EU-Turkey relations ahead of the meeting, following the conclusions of the European Council in December 2020.
- Russia: The EU leaders will hold a strategic debate on relations with Russia.

[Video conference of the members of the European Council, 25-26 March 2021](#)

[Euro summit, 26 March 2021](#)

[Annotated draft agenda](#)

[COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic: the EU's response](#)

[European Council conclusions, 1-2 October 2020](#)

[European Council conclusions, 10-11 December 2020](#)

[Statement of the Euro Summit, 11 December 2020](#)

[A digital future for Europe \(background information\)](#)

[EU single market \(background information\)](#)

European Semester

The Council will examine a presidency synthesis report on the contributions of several informal video conferences of ministers responsible for economic and financial affairs, employment and social affairs, internal market and industry, environment and research, regarding the 2021 European Semester and the recovery and resilience plans.

The report notes that, according to the Commission's latest winter forecast, the economic outlook crucially depends on the evolution of the pandemic and of the restrictions on economic activity to contain it and that policy support at national and EU level will be crucial for the recovery.

In the context of the implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, the report emphasises that the national recovery and resilience plans should become the main reference document on the Member States' forward-looking policy initiatives. The plans have to encompass the national agenda of reforms and investments, be consistent with the relevant country-specific challenges and priorities identified in the context of the European Semester, be in line with the EU policy objectives and focus on the green and digital transitions.

The European Semester provides a framework for the coordination of economic policies across the European Union. It allows EU countries to discuss their economic and budget plans and monitor progress at specific times throughout the year.

This year the Commission will replace the European Semester country reports with analytical documents assessing the substance of the recovery and resilience plans. The Council underlined the importance of maintaining horizontal discussions within relevant committees involved in the European Semester,.

The Council is also expected to agree to forward a draft recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area to the European Council.

The Presidency will present an updated roadmap on the 2021 European Semester. This roadmap was prepared having in mind the particular context deriving from the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for continued adjustment to articulate the Recovery and Resilience Facility with the European Semester.

The roadmap is divided into two phases: the first is related to the recovery and resilience plans and covers the period up to the March European Council; the second is focused on the future of the Semester in the context of the Recovery and Resilience Facility and, covers the period between the European Council meetings in March and June 2021.

[Synthesis report on Council contributions on the 2021 European Semester](#)

[Recommendation for a Council recommendation on the economic policy of the euro area](#)

[European Semester 2021 - Updated roadmap](#)

[Recovery and Resilience Facility](#)

[European Semester 2021 – an exceptional cycle](#)

Conference on the Future of Europe

The Presidency will inform ministers about the state of play on the Conference on the Future of Europe, aimed at involving citizens in a wide-ranging debate on Europe's future in the coming decade and beyond, including in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Council, the European Parliament and the Commission signed on 10 March a joint declaration that sets out the objectives, structure, scope and timing of the Conference.

The constitutive meeting of the Conference's Executive Board will take place shortly to discuss a range of issues, including internal arrangements and the launch of the online platform, as well as the planning for future Conference events.

The Council will be represented on the Board by the Presidency and the two subsequent presidencies, with the following four presidencies having observer status.

The Conference's activities are expected to start soon. The Conference's joint presidency will invite the Conference to reach conclusions by Spring 2022.

The Conference on the Future of Europe should be seen as an inclusive platform, bringing together different voices to generate a wide-ranging reflection and debate on the challenges Europe is facing and on its long-term future.

[The Conference on the Future of Europe gets green light from the Council](#)

[Joint declaration](#)

[Conference on the Future of Europe - revised Council position \(3 February 2021\)](#)

[Conference on the Future of Europe - Council position \(24 June 2020\)](#)
