



Informal video conference of European affairs ministers, Tuesday 20 April 2021

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

The meeting will start at 10.00.

Ministers will take stock of the state of play of EU-UK relations and EU coordination on COVID-19. As part of the annual Rule of Law Dialogue, they will hold a country-specific discussion. The presidency will update ministers on the Conference on the Future of Europe and the Enlargement and Stabilisation and Association process.

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

* * *

[Informal video conference of European affairs ministers, 20 April 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.

EU-UK relations

European affairs ministers will assess the state of play of EU-UK relations, in light of the most recent events.

EU and UK negotiators reached an agreement on a trade and cooperation agreement (TCA) and a security of information agreement on 24 December 2020. The EU and the UK agreed to provisionally apply these agreements as of 1 January 2021, pending the EU ratification process and the official entry into force.

The agreement provided for its time-limited provisional application until the end of February, unless a later date was agreed by the parties. On 23 February 2021, the EU-UK Partnership Council decided, at the EU's request, to extend the provisional application until 30 April 2021 to allow sufficient time to complete the legal-linguistic revision of the agreements in all 24 languages.

On 26 February 2021, the Council requested the European Parliament's consent to its decision on the conclusion of the agreements. Once the European Parliament has given its consent and once all 24 language versions of the agreements have been established as authentic and definitive, the Council will be in a position to adopt the decision on their conclusion, allowing their entry into force. This will be the last step for the EU ratification.

On 1 January 2021, the substantive provisions of the Protocol on Ireland and Northern Ireland, agreed by the EU and the UK as an integral part of the Withdrawal Agreement, also started to apply. As the UK was not fully ready for the end of the transition period, the EU and UK agreed a number of unilateral declarations to provide time-limited solutions in a number of areas.

On 3 March 2021, the UK government stated its intention to unilaterally delay the full application of the protocol. On 15 March the EU sent the UK a letter of formal notice for breaching the substantive provisions of the protocol and the good faith obligation under the withdrawal agreement, as well as a political letter calling on the UK government to rectify and refrain from putting into practice these unilateral measures. In parallel, contacts between the EU and the UK are ongoing at technical level to find swift pragmatic solutions within the framework of the protocol.

[EU-UK negotiations on the future relationship \(background information\)](#)

[Withdrawal Agreement: Commission sends letter of formal notice \(Commission press release, 15 March 2021\)](#)

EU coordination on COVID-19

Ministers for European Affairs will take stock of the COVID-19 pandemic and the EU response, covering the state of play on vaccines, the ongoing work on digital green certificates, and the epidemiological situation and travel restrictions.

On 14 April EU ambassadors approved the Council mandate to negotiate the digital green certificate with the Parliament, which is intended to facilitate the safe free movement of people within the EU during the COVID-19 pandemic. The negotiations in the framework of ordinary legislative procedure are scheduled to take place in May, with a view to conclusion in June. The ongoing technical work on COVID-19 interoperable digital certificates is part of the preparations for a common approach to the future gradual lifting of restrictions. However, due to the serious epidemiological situation, the current measures, including on non-essential travel, will be kept in place for the time being.

[COVID-19: Council agrees its negotiating mandate on the Digital Green Certificate](#)

[Presidency press release on solidarity vaccines](#)

[COVID-19: research and vaccines](#)

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

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

[COVID-19: travel and transport - Council updates recommendations on COVID-19 travel measures \(background information\)](#)

Annual Rule of Law Dialogue

In the framework of the annual Rule of Law Dialogue, ministers will hold a country-specific discussion covering rule-of-law developments in five member states: Germany, Ireland, Greece, Spain and France

This is the second country-specific discussion to take place at the Council, after that of last November, which focused on the situation in Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark and Estonia.

The exercise is part of a strengthened, more structured approach, aimed at further improving the rule of law in all member states, within the framework of the conclusions adopted by the Council in 2014, that established the dialogue.

Under this approach, the dialogue is organised into two different types of political discussion:

a horizontal discussion covering general rule-of-law developments in the EU; and country-specific discussions addressing key developments in each member state, one by one.

This new approach is expected to continue in the coming years.

On 30 September 2020 the European Commission published the first Rule of Law Report which served as a basis for discussion and focused on four pillars: justice systems; the anti-corruption framework; media pluralism; constitutional and other issues. The Commission intends to publish a second report in July of this year.

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

[General Affairs Council, 13 October 2020](#)

[Video conference of European affairs ministers, 17 November 2020](#)

Conference on the Future of Europe

Ministers for European Affairs will be informed by the presidency about the state of play regarding the Conference on the Future of Europe, following the first two meetings of the Conference's Executive Board.

The Conference on the Future of Europe is 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.

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

After a first constitutive meeting of the Conference's Executive Board, a second meeting took place on 7 April and validated the Conference's digital platform that is set to be officially launched on 19 April.

A formal inaugural event of the Conference is foreseen in hybrid mode on 9 May and is expected to take place from Strasbourg.

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

[Conference on the Future of Europe: launch of the citizens' platform on 19 April](#)

[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 \(24 June 2020\)](#)

Enlargement and Stabilisation and Association Process

The Presidency will offer a short information point about Enlargement and the Stabilisation and Association process and its intentions for the coming months.

Some of the important issues in this area are the state of the negotiations on the IPA III Regulation, the ongoing discussions on the application of the revised enlargement methodology to Montenegro and Serbia, and the organization of Intergovernmental conferences (IGCs) with Western Balkans candidate countries.

[EU enlargement \(background information\)](#)
