



Council of the
European Union

051663/EU XXVII.GP
Eingelangt am 24/02/21

EN

11734/20

(OR. en)

PRESSE 27
PR CO 27

OUTCOME OF THE COUNCIL MEETING

3775th Council meeting

General Affairs

Brussels, 13 October 2020

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Germany's Minister of State for Europe

P R E S S

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- Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
- Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
- Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

ITEMS DEBATED

EU-UK relations

The Union's chief negotiator, Michel Barnier, informed ministers of the state of play of the EU-UK negotiations, the implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement and the EU's readiness efforts in view of the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020.

Ministers reaffirmed their support for the chief negotiator and his mandate, and expressed their trust that further progress can be achieved. The EU remains committed to concluding an ambitious agreement for future relations. Nevertheless, ministers underlined the need for businesses and countries to prepare for all scenarios.

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.

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

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

Rule of law dialogue

The presidency has developed a new approach to the Council's annual rule of law dialogue. Ministers had a horizontal discussion on general developments, around four pillars: justice systems, the anti-corruption framework, media pluralism, and other institutional issues linked to checks and balances. One of the elements under discussion was the rule of law report, recently issued by the European Commission.

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 which established the dialogue. It 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.

Country-specific aspects will 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, Czechia, Denmark and Estonia.

This new approach is expected to continue to be followed in the coming years: in 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 \(European Commission\)](#)

European Council

The Council examined 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 and 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](#)

Conference on the Future of Europe

There was an information point from the presidency about the Conference on the Future of Europe.

The 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.

The presidency explained that contacts are still ongoing with the other institutions with the view to reaching an agreement on a joint declaration to pave the way for the launch of the Conference.

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 permit. 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.

Next multiannual financial framework and the recovery package

The presidency briefed ministers on the ongoing talks at political level with the European Parliament and the Commission with a view to securing the Parliament's consent to the regulation laying down the multiannual financial framework for 2021-2027.

The EU institutions have been moving forward in finding common ground on a number of issues, including the governance of funding under Next Generation EU and horizontal issues such as climate protection and gender mainstreaming. Trilogue meetings with the Parliament on the new conditionality mechanism have also started.

The presidency deemed a swift agreement on the overall package possible and emphasised the urgency of concluding the process as soon as possible.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

Access to justice - digitalisation

The Council today adopted conclusions on seizing the opportunities of digitalisation for access to justice ([11599/20](#)).

The further digitalisation of the member states' judicial systems has enormous potential to continue to facilitate and improve access to justice for citizens throughout the EU. Digital tools can help to better structure proceedings and to automate and accelerate the handling of standardised and uniform tasks, thereby increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of court proceedings. The COVID-19 crisis has confirmed the need to invest and make use of digital tools in judicial proceedings.

[Digital justice: Council adopts conclusions on digitalisation to improve access to justice \(press release\)](#)

COVID-19 coordination - measures affecting free movement

Today the Council adopted a recommendation on a coordinated approach to the restrictions of free movement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This recommendation aims to avoid fragmentation and disruption, and to increase transparency and predictability for citizens and businesses ([11689/1/20](#)).

Any measures restricting free movement to protect public health must be proportionate and non-discriminatory, and must be lifted as soon as the epidemiological situation allows.

[COVID-19: Council adopts a recommendation to coordinate measures affecting free movement \(press release\)](#)

TRADE POLICY

Agreement with Cuba on tariffs and trade following Brexit

The Council adopted two decision (10635/20) related to tariff and trade as a consequence of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union.

The first one is related to the modification of concessions on all the tariff-rate quotas included in the EU Schedule CLXXV and the second one is a request for the consent of the European Parliament.

Agreement with Norway on tariffs and trade following Brexit

The Council adopted two decision (10641/20) related to tariff and trade as a consequence of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union.

The first one is related to the modification of concessions on all the tariff-rate quotas included in the EU Schedule CLXXV and the second one is a request for the consent of
