

Media advisory – Informal video conference of foreign affairs and home affairs ministers, 15 March 2021



Indicative programme

Chairs: Josep Borrell , EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy,

Eduardo Cabrita, Minister of Internal Administration

Doorstep by Minister Cabrita
Doorstep Borrell

14.00 – Video conference of ministers of foreign affairs and home affairs ministers

Agenda

External dimension of the EU's migration policy under the New Pact on migration and asylum:

- Mutually beneficial partnerships with key third countries – migration as a core element in bilateral relations
- Enhancing coordination and cooperation among EU actors to best achieve our migration objective

Any other business

Enhancing EU-North Africa countries' cooperation on Justice and Home Affairs

+/- 17.15 – [press conference](#) in live streaming

Arrangements for the press conference

Please note that there will be no physical press conference. EU accredited journalists will be able to ask questions remotely provided they have registered in advance.

You can register and have the possibility to ask questions remotely through [this link](#). Journalists who already registered for previous home affairs or foreign affairs videoconferences do not need to register again.

Deadline for registration: Monday, 15 March 16:15.

Further instructions will be sent to all registered participants approximately half an hour after the deadline.

[Visit the meeting page](#)

ESMA SELECTS NATASHA CAZENAVE AS CANDIDATE FOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR POSITION

The Board of Supervisors (Board) decision follows an open selection process, which it has today communicated to the European Parliament (Parliament). The Board will appoint the candidate as the new Executive Director following confirmation by the Parliament, with the confirmation process expected to take place in the coming weeks.

The candidate, once confirmed, will replace the current Executive Director, Verena Ross, who has now served the maximum term allowed under the ESMA Regulation and steps down on 29 May 2021. The incoming Executive Director will be appointed to serve a five-year term, renewable once.

Ms. Cazenave is currently Deputy Secretary General and Head of the Policy and International Affairs Directorate at the Autorité des Marchés Financiers (AMF).

Further information:

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Press release – COVID-19 vaccines: MEPs to debate concerns about virus mutation



On Monday, Members of the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) Committee will question representatives from the [European Medicines Agency](#) (EMA), the [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control](#) (ECDC) and the [World Health Organisation](#) (WHO) on the efficacy of vaccines against mutations of the COVID-19 virus.

The invited experts are:

- Dr Marco Cavaleri, Head of biological health threats and vaccines strategy and Chair of the COVID-19 Emergency Task Force, EMA
- Dr Bruno Ciancio, Head of surveillance, ECDC
- Dr Katherine O'Brien, Department of Immunisation, Vaccines and Biologicals Director, WHO.

During the same meeting, Commission Deputy Director-General for Health Pierre Delsaux will present MEPs with the Commission's communication on the [HERA Incubator](#), a project designed to monitor variants, exchange data and cooperate on adapting vaccines.

When: Monday 15 March 2021, 13:30 – 15:45

Where: European Parliament in Brussels, room Paul Henri Spaak 1A002 and videoconference

You can watch the debate live [here](#).

Background

Parliament organised several debates in different committees as well as at plenary sessions on various aspects of the COVID-19 vaccination strategy. Most recently, [MEPs discussed ways to increase the roll-out of vaccines](#) with CEOs of pharmaceutical companies. The public health committee will evaluate the growing threat of COVID-19 variants and the EU plans to tackle this challenge.

Press release – Connecting Europe Facility: provisional deal on next generation programme



A provisional agreement between Parliament and Council reached on Thursday evening sets the framework for how the funds for the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) will be used from 2021 to 2027. The programme will fund transport, energy and digital projects, and ensure that essential Trans-European projects, such as Rail Baltica, alternative fuels charging infrastructure and the roll out of 5G coverage to important transport axes are finished on time by 2030.

With an overall budget of about €30 billion (in 2018 constant prices), CEF will fund projects to modernise transport infrastructure and cross-border projects with an EU added value. Around €10 billion allocated to cross-border transport projects will come from Cohesion Funds and will help EU countries complete missing transport links. A share of €1.4 billion will be designated to fast track the completion of major missing cross border railway projects, to be selected by the Commission on a competitiveness basis.

In the digital sector, CEF will support the development of projects of common interest on safe and secure very high capacity digital networks and 5G systems, as well as the digitalisation of transport and energy networks.

The programme will finally aim to make energy networks more interoperable and ensure that projects funded are in line with EU and national climate and energy plans.

Rapporteurs' quotes

Transport and Tourism rapporteur [Marian-Jean Marinescu](#) (EPP, RO) said: “I am happy that we ensured future funding to modernise and expand infrastructure projects in Europe. Modern and efficient connections will benefit all Europeans, contribute to more growth and create jobs across the EU. More investments will also help the transport sector to cope with the many challenges posed by decarbonisation that it will face in the near future”.

His colleague and co-rapporteur on the Transport and Tourism Committee, [Dominique Riquet](#) (Renew, FR) added: “This financing tool is needed more than ever. We need to develop further and faster transport projects to stimulate growth, be more competitive and strengthen cohesion across Europe. Achieving the Green Deal will not be possible if we do not upgrade our infrastructure for the digital and environmental transition. The CEF is a necessity for Europe to achieve those goals”.

Industry, Research and Energy rapporteur [Henna Virkkunen](#) (EPP, FI) stressed: “The programme finances key cross-border connectivity and renewable energy projects between member states, and will allow Europe to take a leap towards a digital and climate-neutral economy. This is vital to ensure we stay competitive in the future”.

Next steps

The informal deal on the Connecting Europe Facility programme still needs to be approved by the Council’s Committee of Permanent Representatives and Parliament’s Transport and Industry committees, and then the Council and Parliament as a whole.

[Hong Kong: Declaration by the High Representative on behalf of the EU on the electoral system](#)



The National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China adopted today a Decision that will have a significant impact on democratic accountability and political pluralism in Hong Kong.

The Decision will lead to a concentration of power and influence in the Hong Kong Election Committee, which is not a democratically elected body. The Decision will lead to a reduction in the proportion of directly elected representatives in the Hong Kong Legislative Council. It also erodes the ability of Hongkongers to be legitimately represented and to directly influence the decisions it takes. These changes run counter to the commitments to greater democratic representation through universal suffrage as the ultimate aim for the selection of the Chief Executive and the election

of the Legislative Council as enshrined in article 45 and 68 of the Basic Law.

The European Union regrets that the fundamental freedoms, democratic principles and the political pluralism that are central to Hong Kong's identity and prosperity are under increasing pressure by the authorities. These freedoms were meant to be protected until at least 2047. They were agreed in the Sino-British Declaration registered by the Chinese and British governments at the United Nations and enshrined by the National People's Congress in the Hong Kong Basic Law.

Today's Decision is therefore yet another breach of the "One Country Two Systems" principle, and another violation of China's international commitments and the Hong Kong Basic Law.

The European Union calls on the Chinese and the Hong Kong authorities to restore confidence in Hong Kong's democratic process and to end the persecution of those who promote democratic values. At the Foreign Affairs Council on 22 February 2021, EU Foreign Ministers agreed to work on a set of short- and longer-term actions, in addition to the initial response package adopted in July 2020. In light of this most recent Decision, the European Union will consider taking additional steps and pay increased attention to the situation in Hong Kong as part of the overall relations between the European Union and China.