

Media advisory – Foreign Affairs Council of 22 February 2021

Indicative programme

from 08.00

Arrivals ([live streaming](#))

+/- 08.15

Doorstep by High Representative Josep Borrell

+/- 09.15

Beginning of the Foreign Affairs Council (roundtable)

Adoption of the agenda

Adoption of non-legislative A items

+/- 09.20

Current affairs and review of the latest international developments

Russia

Strategic Compass

Hong Kong

+/- 14.00

Informal exchange with the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken via video conference

Any other business

At the end of the meeting (+/- 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 using [this link](#).

Journalists who already registered for previous Foreign Affairs Council press conferences do not need to register again.

- **Deadline: Monday, 22 February 2021, 16.00**

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

[Visit the meeting page](#)

Media advisory – Informal video conference of fisheries ministers of 22 February 2021

Indicative programme

Chair:

Ricardo Serrão Santos, Minister of the Sea of Portugal

10.00

Beginning of the informal video conference of fisheries ministers

Main items

– Council Decision concerning the position to be taken on behalf of the European Union in the consultations with the United Kingdom to agree on total allowable catches for 2021 and for certain deep sea stocks for 2021 and 2022

Any other business

– Preparation for the 7th Round of negotiations for the renewal of the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement (SFPA) of the EU with the Islamic Republic of Mauritania

At the end of the meeting (+/-13.30) press conference in [live streaming](#).

Arrangements for the press conference

Please note that the press conference after the meeting will take place remotely. In order to participate and ask questions, EU accredited journalists should register using [this link](#).

Journalists who already registered for previous press conferences of fisheries ministers do not need to do it again.

- **Deadline for the registration: Monday 22 February, 12.30**

Further instructions will be sent to all registered participants after the deadline.

[Videos and photos from the event](#)

[Visit the meeting page](#)

G7 Leaders' statement, 19 February 2021



We, the leaders of the Group of Seven, met today and resolved to work together to beat COVID-19 and build back better. Drawing on our strengths and values as democratic, open economies and societies, we will work together and with others to make 2021 a turning point for multilateralism and to shape a recovery that promotes the health and prosperity of our people and planet.

We will intensify cooperation on the health response to COVID-19. The dedication of essential workers everywhere represents the best of humanity, while the rapid discovery of vaccines shows the power of human ingenuity. Working with, and together to strengthen, the World Health Organisation (WHO), and supporting its leading and coordinating role, we will: accelerate global vaccine development and deployment; work with industry to increase manufacturing capacity, including through voluntary licensing; improve information sharing, such as on sequencing new variants; and, promote transparent and responsible practices, and vaccine confidence. We reaffirm our support for all pillars of the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A), its COVAX facility, and affordable and equitable access to vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics, reflecting the role of extensive immunisation as a global public good. Today, with increased financial commitments of over four billion USD to ACT-A and COVAX, collective G7 support totals seven and a half billion USD. We invite all partners, including the G20 and International Financial Institutions, to join us in increasing support to ACT-A, including to increase developing countries' access to WHO-approved vaccines through the COVAX facility.

COVID-19 shows that the world needs stronger defences against future risks to global health security. We will work with the WHO, G20 and others, especially through the Global Health Summit in Rome, to bolster global health and health security architecture for pandemic preparedness, including through health financing and rapid response mechanisms, by strengthening the "One Health" approach and Universal Health Coverage, and exploring the potential value of a global health treaty.

We have provided unprecedented support for our economies over the past year totalling over \$6 trillion across the G7. We will continue to support our economies to protect jobs and support a strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive recovery. We reaffirm our support to the most vulnerable countries, our commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals, and our partnership with Africa, including to support a resilient recovery. We will work through the G20 and with the International Financial Institutions to strengthen support for countries' responses by exploring all available tools, including through full and transparent implementation of the Debt Service Suspension Initiative and the Common Framework.

Recovery from COVID-19 must build back better for all. Looking to UNFCCC

COP26 and CBD COP15, we will put our global ambitions on climate change and the reversal of biodiversity loss at the centre of our plans. We will make progress on mitigation, adaptation and finance in accordance with the Paris Agreement and deliver a green transformation and clean energy transitions that cut emissions and create good jobs on a path to net zero no later than 2050. We are committed to levelling up our economies so that no geographic region or person, irrespective of gender or ethnicity, is left behind. We will: champion open economies and societies; promote global economic resilience; harness the digital economy with data free flow with trust; cooperate on a modernised, freer and fairer rules-based multilateral trading system that reflects our values and delivers balanced growth with a reformed World Trade Organisation at its centre; and, strive to reach a consensus-based solution on international taxation by mid-2021 within the framework of the OECD. With the aim of supporting a fair and mutually beneficial global economic system for all people, we will engage with others, especially G20 countries including large economies such as China. As Leaders, we will consult with each other on collective approaches to address non-market oriented policies and practices, and we will cooperate with others to address important global issues that impact all countries.

We resolve to agree concrete action on these priorities at the G7 Summit in the United Kingdom in June, and we support the commitment of Japan to hold the Olympic and Paralympic Games Tokyo 2020 in a safe and secure manner this summer as a symbol of global unity in overcoming COVID-19.

Police dismantle criminal network linked to international VAT fraud trading vegetable oil



12 arrests in Germany and Poland and tax loss for Polish authorities estimated at €17.8 million

The Polish Central Anti-Corruption Bureau (Centralne Biuro Antykorupcyjne) and German Tax Office for Prosecution and Criminal Matters in Berlin (Finanzamt für Fahndung und Strafsachen Berlin), with the support of Europol dismantled an organised crime group involved in international VAT fraud and money laundering. The fraud scheme revolved around the trade of vegetable oil and caused the Polish treasury to lose an estimated €17.8 million in tax. On an action day on 18 February 2021, investigators raided 45 locations across Germany and Poland resulting in the arrest of twelve suspects. The alleged ringleader of the network is believed to be among the arrested suspects.

The criminal gang allegedly set up a fraud scheme involving a string of buffer companies and missing traders to evade tax payment. Through this scam, the missing trader bank accounts did not hold any funds that could have been seized by financial authorities on the suspicion of money laundering. The organised crime group is also thought to have applied to the Polish Development Fund a support package in connection with the COVID-19 economic crisis. As a result of the investigation, the criminals did not receive the financial.

Europol actively supported the investigation from 2019 by providing a secure network for the international exchange of information and bespoke analysis. Europol's operational coordination contributed to effective cross-border cooperation.

Europol's European Financial and Economic Crime Centre (EFECC) helps with identifying and dismantling organised criminal networks involved in cross-border VAT fraud and the tracing and confiscating of the proceeds of missing trader intra community (MTIC) fraud. MTIC is committed through a chain of linked companies when the fraudsters sell goods or services from one EU country to another, taking advantage of the fact that it is legitimate not to charge VAT on such cross-border transactions. MTIC scammers obtain €60 billion in criminal profits every year in the EU by avoiding the payment of VAT or by corruptly claiming repayments of VAT from national authorities.

Article – Coming up: EU recovery, vaccines, sustainable tourism



Vaccines

The health and research committees will look into ways to boost [Covid-19 vaccine](#) production and improve delivery with industry representatives on Thursday.

On Wednesday, the trade committee will discuss EU measures regarding

transparency and authorisation of exports of Covid-19 vaccines.

Check out our timeline to find out [how the EU is tackling the coronavirus pandemic in 2021](#).

Cooperation between parliaments

MEPs and their national counterparts from EU countries, candidate member states and observer countries will talk about the economic, budgetary and social challenges in recovering from the coronavirus pandemic [on Monday](#).

Sustainable tourism and maritime transport

Tourism is one of sectors [most affected by the pandemic](#). The transport and tourism committee will vote on a [report](#) on Wednesday calling for measures to support the sector during the crisis and make tourism more sustainable in the long-run.

On Thursday, the committee will vote on a report proposing measures to create [more efficient and cleaner maritime transport](#).

Disinformation and social media

On Monday, the foreign interference committee will [debate](#) measures to counter foreign interference and disinformation, including possible regulation of social media with Thierry Breton, the commissioner responsible for the internal market; and Nato representatives. MEPs called on the EU to step up its efforts to [regulate social media while protecting freedom of expression](#) during the February plenary session.

Digital

On Tuesday, the industry, research and energy committee will vote on a [report](#) calling for EU legislation on [data](#) to support European innovation while ensuring data protection. The following day, the education committee will vote on proposals on [shaping digital education policy](#) to ensure EU education is adapted to the pandemic, [recovery](#) and digital and [green transitions](#).

Abortion rights and rule of law in Poland

On Wednesday, the civil liberties and women's rights committees will hold a hearing on the [impact of attacks on women's sexual and reproductive health and rights](#) in Poland, and explore the link with the deteriorating rule of law situation in the country. Parliament said in November that the [de facto ban of abortion in Poland](#) puts women's lives at risk.