

Rights and values programme: Council presidency and European Parliament reach provisional agreement



The presidency of the Council and the European Parliament reached a provisional political agreement on the rights and values programme for the period 2021-2027. Funding through this programme aims at protecting rights and values enshrined in the EU treaties in order to sustain open, democratic and inclusive societies. It will have a substantial overall budget of maximum €1.55 billion.

In recent years, extremism, radicalism and division have grown in our societies while the space for independent civil society is shrinking. It is therefore more important than ever to promote the values that bring us together and to defend the equal rights of all our citizens. This programme will support civil society initiatives across the EU. We strengthen our democracies and the rule of law.

Christine Lambrecht, German Federal Minister of Justice and Consumer Protection

The programme will have a budget of €641.7 million, with an additional allocation of maximum €912 million and it sets out four specific objectives:

- to promote equality and rights, including gender equality, anti-discrimination and the rights of children
- to promote citizens engagement and participation in the democratic life of the EU and to raise awareness of the common European history
- to fight violence, notably against children and women
- to protect and promote EU values

The newly introduced objective to protect and promote EU values will receive a substantial allocation of € 689.5 million

An amount of € 91.2 million will be left unattributed so as to be able to tackle any emerging needs and future challenges.

To achieve this, the programme will support civil society organisations and other stakeholders active at local, regional, national and transnational level, and encourage civic and democratic participation.

The provisional political agreement reached today will have to be approved by the European Parliament and the Council. The necessary steps will be undertaken at the beginning of next year.

Council, Commission and Parliament set the EU's legislative priorities for 2021 and objectives for 2020-2024



The Joint Declaration on legislative priorities for 2021 and the Joint Conclusions on Policy Objectives and Priorities for 2020-2024 signed by Angela Merkel, Federal Chancellor of Germany, Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, and David Sassoli, President of the European Parliament, demonstrate the unity of the institutions in these challenging times.

Legislative priorities for 2021

The Joint Declaration for 2021, which draws on the Commission work programme for the year ahead, focuses on six key areas , where legislative proposals have already been presented by the European Commission or will be by the autumn of next year, to:

1. Implement the European Green Deal
2. Shape Europe's digital decade
3. Deliver an economy that works for people
4. Make Europe stronger in the world
5. Promote a free and safe Europe
6. Protect and strengthen our democracy and defend our common European values

Policy objectives and priorities for 2020-2024

For the institutional term up to 2024, the three institutions have agreed to work towards a more resilient Union, striving to recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic while seizing the opportunities presented by the twin climate and digital transitions and enhancing Europe's open strategic autonomy. To set the Union and its partners on the road to recovery and prepare for these transitions, the following policy objectives will be prioritised over the next four years:

1. Ensuring a full recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic;
2. Accelerating the transition to a fairer, healthier, greener and more digital society in the EU and on the global stage;
3. Maintaining the EU's global leadership in fighting climate change;
4. Shaping our own digital solutions and establishing Europe's digital sovereignty;
5. Making our economy more resilient and robust;
6. Defending our common values and strengthening our democratic model;

7. Strengthening the EU's role as a global actor.

Background

Since 2016, the Council, the Parliament and the Commission have discussed the EU's legislative priorities and agreed on their top priorities for the upcoming year, which are set out in annual joint declarations. This has enabled them to work more closely together in tackling the big challenges that lie ahead.

This year, for the first time, the exercise has included a multiannual perspective for 2020-2024 to facilitate long-term planning. At the Commission's initiative, the three institutions agreed joint conclusions on the main policy objectives for this period.

The Council of the EU approved both texts on 4 December 2020 by written procedure.

Next Steps

The Council, the Parliament and the Commission will jointly monitor progress on the implementation of the Joint Declaration and Joint Conclusions.

LIFE programme – Council Presidency reaches provisional political agreement with Parliament



Today the Council presidency today reached a provisional political agreement with Parliament on the extension of the LIFE programme beyond 2020. LIFE is the EU's flagship programme for nature, biodiversity protection and the fight against climate change. From 2021, energy efficiency and renewable energy projects will also benefit from funding via LIFE.

I am very pleased that the Council and Parliament reached an ambitious agreement to improve the LIFE programme. The LIFE programme is one of the EU's key funding instruments for nature, biodiversity, climate action and now clean energy projects. It will be instrumental in helping to implement the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and reach the EU climate neutrality objectives for 2050 in the four corners of Europe and I'm glad that we have succeeded to increase the programme's budget so it can have a larger impact.

The agreement today allocates a total financial envelope of €5.432 billion for LIFE for the period 2021-2027. This increase in budget reflects the agreement found under the EU's long term-budget (MFF) to apply an overall climate target of 30% to the total amount of expenditure from the EU's MFF and Next Generation EU recovery instrument. The Co-legislators also agreed that the duration of the LIFE programme is aligned with the duration of the MFF.

Background

Launched in 1992, the LIFE programme is the only EU fund entirely dedicated to environmental and climate objectives. The general objective of the proposed LIFE programme for 2021-2027 is to contribute to the shift towards a clean, circular, energy-efficient, low-carbon and climate-resilient economy, including through the transition to clean energy, to protect and improve the quality of the environment and to halt and reverse biodiversity loss. To date, LIFE has co-financed more than 4500 projects.

The European Parliament adopted its position on the regulation on 11 December 2018. The Council reached a partial general approach on 20 December 2018. Negotiations between the co-legislators started on 9 January and led to a common understanding on 12 March 2019, that excluded budget-related and horizontal issues. The agreement reached today finalised those points. The political agreement will now be submitted to COREPER for endorsement. The next step is the formal adoption by both institutions before entering into force.

Travel restrictions: Council reviews the list of third countries for which restrictions on non-essential travel should be lifted



Following a review under the recommendation on the gradual lifting of the temporary restrictions on non-essential travel into the EU, the Council updated the list of countries for which travel restrictions should be lifted. As stipulated in the Council recommendation, this list will continue to be reviewed regularly and, as the case may be, updated.

Based on the criteria and conditions set out in the recommendation, as from

16 December member states should **gradually lift the travel restrictions at the external borders for residents of the following third countries:**

- Australia
- Japan
- New Zealand
- Rwanda
- Singapore
- South Korea
- Thailand

- China, subject to confirmation of reciprocity

Travel restrictions should also be gradually lifted for the special administrative regions of China Hong Kong and Macao, subject to confirmation of reciprocity.

Residents of Andorra, Monaco, San Marino and the Vatican should be considered as EU residents for the purpose of this recommendation.

The **criteria** to determine the third countries for which the current travel restriction should be lifted cover in particular the epidemiological situation and containment measures, including physical distancing, as well as economic and social considerations. They are applied cumulatively. Reciprocity should also be taken into account regularly and on a case-by-case basis.

Schengen associated countries (Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway, Switzerland) also take part in this recommendation.

Background

On 16 March 2020, the Commission adopted a communication recommending a temporary restriction of all non-essential travel from third countries into the EU for one month. EU heads of state or government agreed to implement this restriction on 17 March. The travel restriction was extended for a further month respectively on 8 April 2020 and 8 May 2020.

On 11 June the Commission adopted a communication recommending the further extension of the restriction until 30 June 2020 and setting out an approach for a gradual lifting of the restriction on non-essential travel into the EU as of 1 July 2020.

On 30 June the Council adopted a recommendation on the gradual lifting of the temporary restrictions on non-essential travel into the EU, including an initial list of countries for which member states should start lifting the travel restrictions at the external borders. The list is reviewed regularly and, as the case may be, updated.

The Council recommendation is not a legally binding instrument. The authorities of the member states remain responsible for implementing the content of the recommendation. They may, in full transparency, lift only

progressively travel restrictions towards countries listed.

A Member State should not decide to lift the travel restrictions for non-listed third countries before this has been decided in a coordinated manner.

Press release – Leaders of EU institutions establish common priorities for 2021 and until next elections



For the first time, the three Presidents also established, in joint conclusions, common priorities for the remainder of the legislative term.

The resurgence of the coronavirus shows the “overwhelming need” for the European Union to sustain its efforts in overcoming the crisis. It is also time to implement the strategic priorities of a healthier, greener, digital, fairer and social Europe, the joint declaration says. In line with the long-term budget agreement secured by EP negotiators, the three institutions are committed to implementing the roadmap on new own resources. Moreover, citizens must have a greater say on the future of Europe, including through the upcoming Conference on the Future of Europe.

President Sassoli said: *“In these challenging times, it is all the more important that the EU institutions show unity in delivering on the issues which are of most concern to citizens. Together, we have passed legislation to respond urgently to the most pressing COVID-19 challenges. We must now ensure a full recovery from the crisis, while strengthening Europe’s social*

model. In this transition to a greener, fairer and more digital Europe, no one should be left behind”.

Priorities for 2021

The fast-tracked initiatives for 2021 fall under six EU priorities:

- Implementing the European Green Deal (just climate transition, climate neutrality by 2050 and ambitious progress by 2030, biodiversity);
- Shaping Europe’s Digital Decade (single digital services market, strengthened privacy in electronic communications, artificial intelligence framework);
- Delivering an economy that works for people (recovery that reaches everyone in society, social equity, transparent taxation of multinationals, fair competition);
- Making Europe stronger in the world (responsible global leadership and deep partnerships, renewed impetus to transatlantic relations, trade rules that provide for a level playing field);
- Promoting a free and safe Europe (asylum and migration pact, robust Schengen framework, enhanced response to health crises);
- Strengthening democracy and defending European values (consolidate EU’s capacity to protect rule of law and fundamental rights, rules on European political parties and political advertising, equality for men and women in the workplace)

First-ever multiannual objectives

Looking beyond next year, and at the legislative term until 2024, common broader policy objectives include:

- a full recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic while building a European Health Union;
- a transition to a fairer, healthier, greener and more digital society;
- showing global leadership in fighting climate change;
- shaping Europe’s own digital solutions and establishing Europe’s digital sovereignty;
- making Europe’s economy more resilient and robust;
- defending common European values and strengthening the European democratic model;
- amplifying the EU’s role as a global actor.

Background

The Joint Declaration on the EU’s legislative priorities for 2021 is the third since the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-making was signed on 13 April 2016. This is the first time that the three institutions have agreed on common multiannual policy objectives, with Joint Conclusions for 2020-2024. The IIA aims to improve the way the EU legislates to ensure that EU rules better serves citizens and businesses.