

# International Contact Group on Venezuela Ministerial Declaration



1. The International Contact Group met at Ministerial level by videoconference on 17 September. The Group welcomed the participation for the first time of Argentina as full member and announced that Bolivia would be stepping down from the Group.
2. ICG members reaffirmed that the only sustainable solution to the Venezuelan crisis will be an inclusive political, peaceful and democratic one, through free, credible, transparent and fair legislative and presidential elections. They expressed their concern at the narrowing of the democratic space in the country and particularly with a view to the organisation of the upcoming legislative elections, and called for the provision of electoral guarantees in accordance with international standards and the Constitution of Venezuela. Furthermore, they called on all parties to commit to an inclusive and credible negotiation. The ICG welcomes the recent release of some political prisoners and the termination of politically motivated judicial proceedings against members of the opposition, and insists that all remaining political prisoners should be released immediately and unconditionally, and house arrest terminated.
3. ICG members concluded that conditions are not met, at the moment, for a transparent, inclusive, free and fair electoral process. All obstacles to political participation must be removed in order for a meaningful electoral process to take place. This includes, inter alia, respect for the constitutional mandate of the democratically elected National Assembly, returning control of political parties to their rightful administrators, cessation of the disqualification and prosecution of political leaders, full restoration of their and other candidates' rights to equal political participation, a comprehensive update of the voter register, including young voters and Venezuelans abroad, and an independent and balanced CNE, and equal participation and unrestricted access to all media. The ICG requests that these obstacles to free, fair and credible elections be promptly addressed.
4. ICG members welcome the call to the international community to observe the

elections, as a fundamental guarantee of transparency, freedom and fairness of any future electoral process. The ICG notes that the current electoral timetable does not allow the deployment of an Election Observation Mission, nor does it leave enough time and political space for the parties to negotiate the conditions for credible, free and fair elections. The ICG calls for guaranteed minimum conditions of credibility, transparency and inclusiveness in the electoral process, and for the ability to observe the elections without interference, including unobstructed access. The effectual requirements for an electoral observer mission need to be in place credibly and in a timely manner before its deployment.

5. A negotiated process, owned by Venezuelans, and leading to a reinstatement of public powers, transparent and internationally monitored elections and a package of guarantees enabling political coexistence, are essential elements to overcome the crisis, achieve national reconciliation and economic recovery.

6. ICG members reiterate their deep concern about the worsening humanitarian situation in the country, which is now aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst acknowledging the recent expansion of the humanitarian space inside the country, including the authorisation for the EU humanitarian aid bridge in August, the ICG reiterated its call for full, unhindered and unimpeded access for both humanitarian personnel and goods, to provide urgently needed access to medicine, food, gasoline and basic health services. An improvement of the environment for humanitarian actors to operate in line with humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence is necessary to step up the response capacity of the humanitarian organisations. Increased donors support for the humanitarian response, as Venezuela remains one of the least funded humanitarian crises in the world, is much needed.

7. ICG members expressed their support for the work of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN HCHR) and of the UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission, and called for their unfettered access to sites in the country in order to carry out their mandates. ICG members expressed deep concern about human rights violations, as updated in recent reports by UN HCHR Bachelet and the UN Fact-Finding Mission. The ICG stands ready to assist the UN HCHR in her efforts to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Venezuela. The full respect of political rights in the country requires the return of Venezuela to democracy and the rule of law.

8. More than ever Venezuela needs the support of an international community that works together. The ICG expresses its continuing willingness to increase contacts with regional and international partners in order to foster a common understanding and response to the situation in Venezuela. Articulated and complementary international efforts are crucial to help Venezuelans restore democracy and the Constitutional order. Close contacts with national stakeholders will also continue.

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## Venezuela: HR/VP chairs International Contact Group meeting



Today HR/VP Josep Borrell chaired a Ministerial level meeting of the International Contact Group on Venezuela. The HR/VP briefed the group on his latest contacts with national actors, discussed the latest political developments in Venezuela as well as the humanitarian situation in the country, particularly in the context of a worsening Covid-19 pandemic.

HR/VP Borrell outlined the need for a peaceful, negotiated solution to the crisis in Venezuela that includes credible, free and fair elections.

A [Ministerial declaration](#) was agreed by the International Contact Group.

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## Philippines: Speech on behalf of the HR/VP at the European Parli



Delivered by Commissioner Jutta Urpilainen on behalf of High Representative Vice/President Josep Borrell on the situation in the Philippines, including the case of Maria Ressa.

*Check against delivery!*

Thank you.

Madam President, Honourable Members of the European Parliament, thank you for your remarks.

The European Union has expressed its concerns about various human rights issues in the Philippines on numerous occasions: recently through the [EU27 statement at the Human Rights Council](#); also through the [February 2020 biennial Generalised Scheme of Preferences \(GSP\) report](#) discussed in the European Parliament; as well as directly to the authorities, such as during the [first Joint Committee of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement \(PCA\)](#) in January 2020.

More specifically on Maria Ressa's case, the [EEAS Spokesperson issued a statement](#) on 16 June 2020 underlining that her conviction "*raised serious doubts over the respect for freedom of expression as well as for the rule of law in the Philippines[...]* We expect the Philippines, like all countries, to uphold its international human rights obligations and protect and promote fundamental freedoms."

With regard to the monitoring of the Philippines' commitments under GSP+, the Trade Commissioner had clearly communicated our concerns to his counterpart in Manila and the Philippines' reply will be taken into account in assessing the compliance to the GSP+ conditionalities during our bilateral dialogue with the government.

The EU remains convinced that both the Philippines and the EU have most to gain from constructive engagement. During our January [Joint Committee](#), we agreed on the establishment of a Subcommittee on Good Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights. This Subcommittee, expected to meet regularly, will be an important forum for directly addressing all human rights issues. The European External Action Service (EEAS) has proposed to hold a first meeting already

this autumn, by the end of this year, even under a virtual format.

The European Commission and the EEAS will continue raising these matters with the Philippine government in a clear and constructive way.

Thank you.

Link to the video: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-194737>

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## Press release – COVID-19: Member states need to harmonise health assessments and measures



Worried by the recent increase in positive COVID-19 cases across Europe, MEPs deplore that member states have not learned the lessons from the beginning of the crisis and have yet again taken different and uncoordinated measures.

In a resolution adopted by 595 votes in favour, 50 against and 41 abstentions on Thursday, they point to the lack of harmonised methodology used to collect and evaluate the number of infected people, leading to differing health risk assessments and restrictions of free movement for people travelling from



other EU countries.

Following [Tuesday's debate](#) with Commissioner Didier Reynders and Minister Michael Roth of the German presidency, Parliament urges member states to

- adopt the same definition for a positive case of COVID-19, for a death by COVID-19 and for recovery from infection,
- mutually recognise test results in all member states,
- cut disproportionate waiting times for tests
- establish a common quarantine period,
- coordinate travel restrictions when needed, in line with the [Commission's proposal](#) and
- discuss how to return to a fully-functioning Schengen area, without internal border controls and contingency plans, as quickly as possible.

The [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control](#) (ECDC) should be in charge of assessing the risk of the virus spreading and publishing a weekly updated risk map (per region) using a common colour code, based on the data provided by the member states, MEPs say. Its resources and staff should be increased immediately, they add.

### **Encourage the use of tracing apps**

The resolution asks the Commission to develop a harmonised passenger locator form to build trust in an EU-wide monitoring system. The use of [tracing apps](#) should be encouraged, according to MEPs, who expect the national systems to be interoperable by October, to allow for EU-wide COVID-19 tracing. They underline that these apps must operate in full compliance with the [General Data Protection Regulation](#).

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## **[Press release – MEPs approve €6.2 billion to tackle crisis and speed up vaccine deployment](#)**



Cohesion funds will be topped up with €5.1 billion to ensure that requests for reimbursements from member states for actions taken under the [Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus](#) (CRII+) can be covered. The CRII+ was created to relax the cohesion spending rules to increase flexibility, whereas the [CRII](#) redirected unspent money from the EU budget to tackling the COVID-19 crisis.

The vaccine-related €1.1 billion will increase payments for the [Emergency Support Instrument](#) (ESI), a significant part of which is used to secure the production of vaccines in the EU and sufficient supplies for its member states. This is part of the European Commission's COVID-19 [vaccine strategy](#).

Parliament approved the proposal with 643 votes in favour, 29 against and 14 abstentions.

### **Background**

Recognising the importance and urgency of the proposal that was tabled on 28 August, Parliament treated it under the urgent procedure ([Rule 163 of the Rules of Procedure](#)) without a report from the Committee on Budgets.