

Background – European Parliament Press Kit for the European Council of 25-26 March 2021



Additional information, including contact details for the MEPs involved, can be found on the European Parliament's website.

European Parliament President David Sassoli will represent the European Parliament at the summit and:

- address the heads of state or government at 13:00;
- hold a press conference at around 14:30. More information [here](#).

On 25 and 26 March, EU leaders will meet via video conference to discuss the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Single Market, industrial policy, digital transformation and the economy, the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean, and relations with Russia.

Five arrests in hit against investment fraudsters



On 4 March 2021, Europol supported a hit on a large investment fraud network operating in several EU Member States. The investigation, led by the Lithuanian Police (Lietuvos Policija) and involving law enforcement authorities from Germany, Sweden and the United Kingdom was also assisted by Eurojust.

The action day in Lithuania led to:

- 26 house searches (18 in Lithuania and 8 in Sweden)
- 5 arrests (4 in Lithuania and 1 in Sweden)
- 38 victims identified
- Accounts worth more than €1.2 million frozen (€500 000 in Lithuania and €700 000 in other countries)
- Seizures include electronic equipment and various documents

Fake retirement plan fraud worth €1.5 million unveiled

The criminal network was specifically targeting academics in Germany. The victims were interested in investing their funds in saving accounts hosted on foreign online deposit platforms. They found the offers themselves and applied for these services. They also sent deposits to individual accounts opened under their names. In reality, the accounts belonged to Lithuanian companies running the scam. The suspects offered savings accounts, where the funds were to be deposited for a longer period, usually between six months and three years. They used this trick to earn enough time to escape with the funds and hide their traces. Once received, the funds were transferred to accounts in other EU Member States with part of it being cashed out at ATMs in Sweden. Investigators estimate that the criminal network has defrauded its German victims of a total of €1.5 million.

Europol supported the operation by facilitating information exchange and providing analytical support. During the action days, Europol cross-checked operational information in real-time against Europol's databases to provide leads to investigators in the field.

Press release – EP Today



There will be live coverage of debates and votes on Parliament's [webstreaming](#) and on [EbS+](#).

For detailed information on the session, please see our [newsletter](#).

All information regarding plenary, including speakers' lists, can be found [here](#).

President Sassoli to address EU summit at 13.00 / Press conference at 14.30

EP President David Sassoli will address heads of state or government at the EU summit at 13.00, where he will deliver Parliament's position on the EU's coordinated response to the COVID-19 pandemic, on EU-US relations, Turkey, the single market and digital transformation. A press conference is scheduled at 14.30. See more info [here](#).

Digital Green Certificate: Parliament to decide on fast-track approval

At 11.00, MEPs will decide whether to accelerate the approval of the Digital Green Certificate under the Parliament's urgent procedure, to facilitate its adoption before the summer. The result of the vote will be announced at 14.30.

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Parliament prepared to take legal action to protect the budget

MEPs will vote on a resolution warning they will take the Commission to court

if it fails to protect the EU's budget and values. The draft resolution underlines the importance of protecting the NextGenerationEU recovery fund and safeguarding the EU's values. It stresses that the rules must be applied and "cannot be subject to the adoption of guidelines", which the Commission has stated it is preparing. The result of the vote will be announced at 19.00

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In brief

European Strategy for data/General Data Protection Regulation. The EU should tap into increasing volumes of data as a source of growth and innovation, according to a report on a "European Strategy for data" to be debated from around 9.30. Parliament will also discuss and vote on the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), two years after it has taken effect. Voting results for both resolutions will be announced at 19.00.

Enlargement. From around 11.00, MEPs will discuss and vote on reforms required of Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia to advance their progress to possible future EU membership. After the announcement of the vote results on the amendments, the rapporteurs will hold press conferences, at 13.30 (Albania and North Macedonia) and 17.00 (Kosovo and Serbia).

Malta. At 14.30, MEPs will exchange views with the Commission on the Rule of law in Malta. They will discuss the latest developments regarding the assassination of Daphne Caruana Galizia that highlighted organised crime, corruption and a lack of media freedom in Malta.

Votes

The first voting session lasts from 11:00 – 12.15, with results announced at 14.30.

Among other things, MEPs will vote on requests for urgent procedure for the Digital Green Certificate.

The second voting session lasts from 16:30 to 17:45, with results announced at 19.00.

MEPs will cast their final votes on, among other things,

- Rule of Law mechanism
- Own Resources
- Impact on fisheries of marine litter
- EU-Africa Strategy
- Sustainable Tourism
- European Strategy for Data
- Implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation

- Progress reports on Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia
 - Guidelines for the 2022 Budget
 - Implementation of Air Quality Directives
 - Capital Markets Recovery Package.
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[Press release – Work begins on the Conference on the Future of Europe](#)



Just two weeks after the Joint Declaration on the Conference on the Future of Europe was signed in Brussels by the European Parliament President, David Sassoli, Portuguese Prime Minister António Costa, on behalf of the Presidency of the Council, and by the Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, the Executive Board of the Conference on the Future of Europe held its constitutive meeting on 24 March 2021 in Brussels. The Executive Board is composed of representatives from the three institutions (European Parliament, Council and Commission), on equal footing. The Executive Board will oversee the work, process and organisation of the Conference.

At this first meeting, the Executive Board agreed on a series of essential items needed to get the Conference started. They took the first steps to ensure that citizens can soon start to contribute to the Conference without delay, in particular on the multilingual Digital Platform, including the Charter for citizen's participation and the visual identity. The Board also held an exchange of views on its internal working methods.

The Executive Board also discussed the possibility of a formal event on 9 May in Strasbourg as well as to hold the first Conference Plenary on 10 May, depending on the public health conditions (or subject to restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic).

The Portuguese Secretary of State for EU Affairs and co-chair from the Presidency of the Executive Board, Ana Paula Zacarias, said *"The Conference on the Future of Europe should be an inclusive platform bringing together different voices, engaging on a wide reflection and debate on the challenges Europe is facing and its long-term future. Putting citizens at the centre of European policies."*

From the European Parliament's side, co-chair Guy Verhofstadt (RE, BE) said: *"In transformative times, it is up to citizens to decide what they expect from the EU and how to make that happen. It's their Europe, and their future, so it's their Conference! Our job is to make sure the Conference gains public momentum, and then, to draw an agenda from it to shape Europe's future together."*

Commission Vice-President for Democracy and Demography, and co-chair, Dubravka Šuica, said *"The Conference will enable citizens from every corner of the EU, and from all backgrounds, to share their ideas, hopes and dreams in shaping their Union's future. This is a unique and historic moment for citizen engagement in the European Union."*

Representatives from COSAC, the Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee and social partners were also invited as observers to this meeting.

Next steps:

The Executive Board will convene again on 7 April in the European Parliament and the Digital Platform will be launched on 19 April.

List of Participants (both Representatives and Observers of the Executive Board):

The co-chairs of the Executive Board are Guy Verhofstadt on behalf of the European Parliament, the Portuguese Secretary of State for EU Affairs, Ana Paula Zacarias as the Presidency's representative and the European Commission Vice-President, Dubravka Šuica.

The other representatives of the Executive Board are: from the Parliament's side Manfred Weber (EPP, DE) and Iratxe García Pérez (S&D, ES), from the Council's side the Slovenian Secretary of State for EU Affairs, Gasper Dovzan, and the French Minister of State for EU Affairs, Clément Beaune, and from the Commission side Vice-President for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight, Maroš Šefčovič, and Vice-President for Values and Transparency, Věra Jourová.

Parliament's observers are Gerolf Annemans (ID, BE), Daniel Freund (Greens/EFA, DE), Zdzisław Krasnodębski (ECR, PL) and Helmut Scholz (The Left, DE). From the Council's side the observers are the Czech State Secretary for EU Affairs, Milena Hrdinková, the Swedish Minister for EU Affairs, Hans Dahlgren, the Spanish Secretary of State for the EU, Juan González-Barba Pera, and the Belgian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Deputy Prime Minister, Sophie Wilmès, from the Council side.

Lastly, COSAC, the Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee, BusinessEurope and ETUC have also been invited to participate to the meeting as observers, being represented by: Guido Wolf, Gunther Krichbaum, Luís Capoulas Santos, Marko Pogačnik and Bojan Kekec for COSAC, Apostolos Tzitzikostas for the Committee of the Regions, Christa Schweng for the European Economic and Social Committee, Markus Beyrer for BusinessEurope and Luca Visentini for ETUC.

Press release – Digital Green Certificate is the right move but speeding up vaccination is key



In a debate on the 25-26 March EU summit and the Digital Green Certificate with Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič and the Portuguese Presidency of the Council, MEPs stressed the need to guarantee an adequate number of vaccines across the EU through a coordinated and unified approach. Some expressed their fear that the European Union's credibility is at risk due to the mismanagement of vaccine contracts and the slow distribution of the jabs.

Several speakers referred to delays in delivering Astra Zeneca vaccines and to today's discovery of almost 30 million doses in an Italian factory, with many speakers calling for legal action against the manufacturer. Others warned against an exports ban due to the risk of retaliatory measures that could result in further delays, with some highlighting that many poorer countries that are yet to receive a single dose would be unduly hurt by such a move.

The [Digital Green Certificate](#) proposed by the European Commission can help

guarantee free movement within the European Union and support the much-needed recovery of the travel and tourism sector, a majority of the MEPs who took the floor said. However, some voiced concerns that those who have not been vaccinated may face discrimination, and highlighted the need to ensure highest standards of data protection.

MEPs also referred to relations with Turkey, with many calling for a tougher stance against its illiberal practices and condemning its withdrawal from the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention on violence against women. On Russia, a similar tone prevailed, with some speakers calling for a more proactive stance in promoting European values and others reiterating the call for the [Nord Stream 2 project to be discontinued](#). A few speakers also echoed President Sassoli's solidarity to the MEPs targeted by Chinese sanctions and pointed out that the matter should also be on the summit agenda, with some asking for the continuation of trade talks to be made contingent upon China's adherence to human rights.

Click on the names of the speakers to listen to their interventions:

[Ana Paula ZACARIAS](#), for the Council

[Maroš ŠEFČOVIČ](#) for the Commission

[Manfred WEBER](#) (EPP, DE)

[Iratxe GARCÍA PÉREZ](#) (S&D, ES)

[Katalin CSEHS](#) (Renew Europe, HU)

[Nicolas BAY](#) (ID, FR)

[Philippe LAMBERTS](#) (Greens/European Free Alliance, BE)

[Raffaele FITTO](#) (ECR, IT)

[Martin SCHIRDEWAN](#) (The Left group in the European Parliament, DE)

You can catch up with the [debate](#)

Plenary will vote tomorrow on whether to apply the [urgent procedure](#) to the legislative proposal on the Digital Green Certificate.