

Press briefing ahead of the video conference of the members of the European Council, 25-26 February 2021



The press briefing ahead of the video conference of the members of the European Council of 25 and 26 February 2021 will take place via video conference on **Wednesday 24 February 2021 at 10.00**. English and French interpretation will be available.

This briefing is “off the record”.

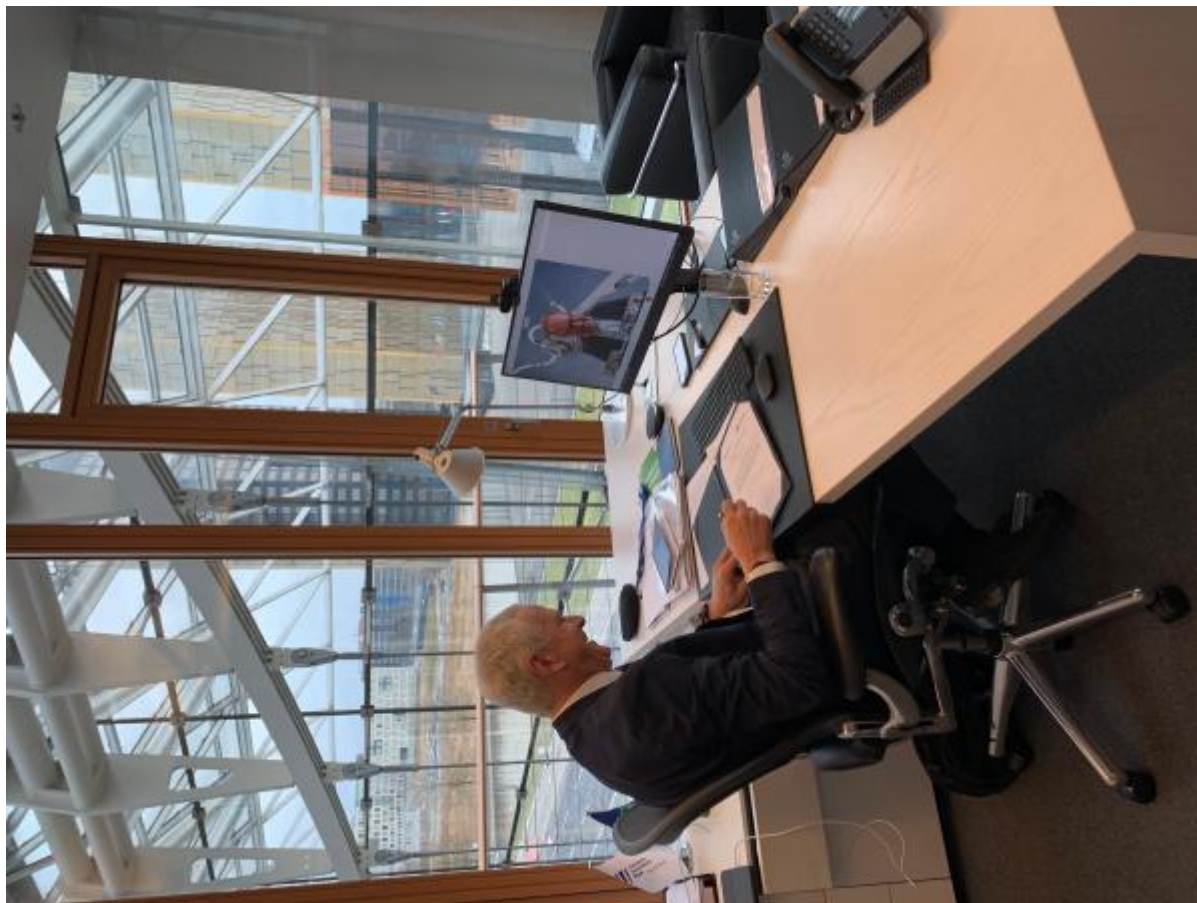
In order to follow the briefing and to be able to ask questions remotely, EU accredited journalists and journalists who had a EUCO accreditation from June 2019 European Council meeting or later, can register using [this link](#)

Journalists who already registered for high-level press conferences (European Councils, international summits) in 2020 or 2021 **don't need to register again**.

Deadline: Wednesday 24 February, 08.30

Further instructions will be sent to all registered participants approximately half an hour before the briefing.

Belgium: EIB supports rollout of smart meters in Flanders by Fluvius



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- **€200 million EIB loan to Fluvius, to support rollout of smart meters in Flanders.**
- **Signature is first tranche of an available facility of up to € 425 million.**
- **Goal is to have smart meters installed at 80% of Fluvius' clients by end of 2024.**

The European Investment Bank (EIB) has announced that it will make available a lending facility to Belgian network operator Fluvius for the rollout of smart metering systems in Flanders. A first tranche of €200 million has now been signed. Fluvius will use the facility to rollout smart meters for Flemish families and companies in 300 cities and municipalities, as well as for connecting new users to the network.

EIB Vice-President **Kris Peeters** said: *"Europe's green and sustainable recovery from the corona crisis will pass through projects like this one. Our houses are one of the main emitters of CO₂, partially because of inefficient electricity use. Smart meters like the ones that Fluvius is installing, will play an important role in increasing energy efficiency and preventing waste."*

The new meters allow for remote readings, and make it possible to provide near real-time consumption information to consumers. This will increase consumer awareness of their energy consumption and thus spur energy efficiency. The smart meters also make the grid more flexible, which is essential considering the increasing decentralised production of renewable energy.

Frank Vanbrabant, CEO of Fluvius, added: *“Digital energy meters are crucial in making the energy transition a success. Only with digital meters will families and SMEs be able to actively manage their energy usage. The new meters can help families with solar panels to immediately use their home-generated electricity as much as possible. They also enable dynamic energy prices. As a result, a family can consume more, cheaper electricity by smartly controlling appliances, or storing energy locally, for example in an electric car. In any case, the digital meter is an important gateway to the energy landscape of the future.”*

Fluvius, a cooperative company owned by 11 inter-municipal companies, is responsible for the construction, management and maintenance of electricity, natural gas, sewerage, cable distribution, and district heating networks in Flanders. Fluvius also maintains the municipal public lighting. In total, the company manages 230.000 km of utility network with 7 million connections. Fluvius operates in all 300 Flemish cities and municipalities.

Media advisory – Informal video conference of European affairs ministers, 23 February 2021



Indicative programme

Chair: Ms. Ana Paula Zacarias, Portuguese Secretary of State of European Affairs

9.30 Beginning of the video conference of European affairs ministers

- a) Videoconference of the Members of the European Council on 25-26 February 2021: Preparation
- b) European Democracy Action Plan
- c) Conference on the Future of Europe
- d) EU-UK relations

Any other business

At the end of the videoconference (+/- 16.00) – press conference in [live streaming](#).

Arrangements for the press conferences

Please note that there will be no physical press conference. In order to participate and ask questions, EU accredited journalists should register using [this link](#). Those who already registered for previous press briefings or

press conferences of informal video conferences of European affairs ministers do not need to do it again.

Deadline for registration: Tuesday, 23 February 2021, 15.00

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

[Videos and photos from the event.](#)

New Consumer Agenda: Council adopts conclusions

The Council today adopted a set of conclusions in response to the Commission's communication on a 'New Consumer Agenda: Strengthening consumer resilience for sustainable recovery' ('the Agenda'), which presents a holistic vision for EU consumer policy for the years 2020 to 2025.



The New Consumer Agenda is an important milestone for the Portuguese Presidency, and we intend to foster its development. The conclusions approved today are a clear signal of the Council's commitment to the implementation of the Agenda's actions. With these conclusions, we keep the ambition high when it comes to promoting a fair and developed European social market economy.

Pedro Siza Vieira, Portuguese Minister of State for the Economy and Digital Transition

The conclusions aim to provide political guidance on the broad range of actions announced by the Commission in the Agenda, highlighting the need to address consumer concerns into other sectoral EU policies, such as the ones linked to the green and digital transitions. They also refer to the importance of consumers' trust for stimulating economic recovery in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis.

The Council welcomes the Commission's intention to address issues such as the 'right to repair', online and offline consumer protection and product safety and the prevention of over-indebtedness in upcoming legislative proposals. It also stresses the need for consistency in the field of digitalisation with recent proposals, such as the Digital Services Act, which should establish a high level of protection to all consumers.

On 25 February 2021, ministers responsible for the internal market and industry will hold, via a tele conference chaired by the Portuguese Minister of State for the Economy and Digital Transition, Pedro Siza Vieira, a policy debate on The New Consumer Agenda in order to discuss the role of businesses and consumers in promoting economic recovery and resilience.

[Visit the meeting page](#)

Venezuela: 19 officials added to the EU sanctions list



The Council today added **19 leading Venezuelan officials** to the list of those subject to restrictive measures, due to their role in acts and decisions undermining democracy and the rule of law in the country, or as a result of serious human rights violations.

This decision follows on from the **Council conclusions of 25 January 2021**, which indicated that the EU stood ready to adopt additional targeted restrictive measures, in view of the deteriorating situation in Venezuela following the December 2020 elections.

The individuals added to the list are responsible, notably, for **undermining the oppositions' electoral rights** and the democratic functioning of the National Assembly, and for **serious violations of human rights** and restrictions of fundamental freedoms.

Today's decision brings to **55** the total number of individuals subject to sanctions, which include **travel bans** and **asset freezes**. These targeted measures are designed **not to have adverse humanitarian effects or unintended consequences for the Venezuelan population**, and can be reversed.

The EU will continue to engage and work with all stakeholders in Venezuela to **promote peaceful dialogue and a democratic and sustainable solution** to the crises in the country.

The EU introduced restrictive measures on Venezuela in November 2017. The measures include an embargo on arms and on equipment for internal repression, and the imposition of travel bans and asset freezes on listed individuals.

[Visit the meeting page](#)