

Joint press release: EU-Canada Leaders' virtual meeting



The President of the European Council, Charles Michel, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and the Prime Minister of Canada, Justin Trudeau, held a Leaders' Virtual Meeting on 29 October 2020.

The leaders re-affirmed their determination to continue joint efforts to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic in keeping with shared principles and values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and based on the EU-Canada Strategic Partnership Agreement. They shared the commitment to take effective measures to protect health, ensure a robust economic recovery, and build more innovative, sustainable, inclusive and resilient economies. In this way the EU and Canada will emerge from this crisis stronger than before and in a better position to address challenges of the future.

Stressing that solidarity, cooperation and effective multilateralism are essential to defeat the virus and accelerate the recovery, the leaders committed to continuing to work closely together in international fora including the G7, the G20, and the United Nations system. Since the start of the pandemic, the EU and Canada have been cooperating closely, including to ensure universal, equitable and affordable access to COVID-19 vaccines, treatments and tests. In this regard, the EU and Canada, alongside other donors, co-hosted a pledging event for the ACT-Accelerator and continue to collaborate to build support for the global initiative, in particular its COVAX Facility, through high-level engagement. The leaders agreed that the EU and Canada will deepen their cooperation and exchange of information on COVID-19 vaccines including research, access, procurement and distribution. They also agreed to further advance their discussions on health matters.

Both sides will continue to provide joint leadership in strengthening the WHO, and the global pandemic preparedness and response capacity more generally. The leaders stressed the importance of an impartial, independent and comprehensive evaluation of the international health response to COVID-19 as outlined in the World Health Assembly resolution of May 2020.

The EU and Canada are implementing the G20 Action Plan agreed by Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors to support the global economic recovery and achieve strong, sustainable, balanced and inclusive growth, which should continue to be reviewed and updated. Leaders emphasized their commitment to build back better by putting in place recovery plans incorporating green transition and digital transformation, while leaving nobody behind. This includes finding new ways to ensure our SMEs take full part in the COVID recovery, including facilitating their use of digital tools to expand commerce and partnerships.

Leaders also stressed the need to make global supply chains more resilient and improve the global level playing field while maintaining open economies.

They agreed to deepen their work towards a strategic partnership on critical raw materials to support the green and digital transition. Leaders also welcomed further G20 efforts to support the most affected low-income countries, including in Africa, including by the extension of the G20/Paris Club Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI). Leaders also recognised that further debt treatment will be required on a case-by-case basis and called on G20 members to endorse the “Common Framework for Debt Treatment beyond the DSSI” agreed by the Paris Club.

On environment, the leaders stressed the urgency to step up global action to tackle climate change. As investments are being made to rebuild economies hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, they called for a green recovery. They also reaffirmed their commitment to the swift, full and effective implementation of the Paris Agreement and to their shared objective of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. The EU and Canada will demonstrate increased ambition on reducing GHG emissions when updating Nationally Determined Contributions ahead of COP26. They also reaffirmed their commitment to support developing countries transition to sustainable, climate-resilient economies, including towards the collective goal to mobilize USD\$100 billion per year by 2020 from a wide variety of sources. Leaders underlined their commitment to move towards the circular economy, including through advocacy at multilateral level, and called for an ambitious global agreement to protect and restore biodiversity at the next Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in 2021 and for a strengthened global framework for sound management of chemicals and waste, at the International Conference on Chemicals Management in 2021.

Leaders highlighted the close collaboration, underpinned by shared values, on ensuring a human-centric digital transformation. They noted ongoing planning for joint research in Quantum technologies. As founding members of the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI), the EU and Canada collaborate across multilateral fora to ensure AI and other digital technologies are advanced in a responsible manner that fosters public trust, including a focus this year on how AI can be leveraged to respond to, and recover from, COVID-19.

The leaders celebrated the third anniversary of the provisional application of the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and welcomed its positive results, noting that bilateral trade between the EU and Canada had, by end of 2019, increased by more than 20% for goods and for services over pre-CETA levels. The leaders affirmed their determination to further facilitate and promote the implementation of CETA in all areas to the benefit of both Europeans and Canadians, and as an important tool in strengthening the post-COVID economic recovery on both sides. The leaders agreed to take new concrete measures to further CETA’s implementation in the areas of Trade and Gender, Trade and Climate Change, and Trade and SMEs, and welcomed Canada’s new membership in the Enterprise Europe Network to promote SMEs taking advantage of CETA. Canada also will host a CETA Clean Tech Summit, when conditions allow, to foster partnerships and business opportunities for Canadian and EU cleantech in support of our respective green economic recoveries.

The leaders agreed to continue working together, in the Ottawa Group and beyond, to reform the World Trade Organization (WTO) in order to protect and strengthen the multilateral rules-based trading system at a time of unprecedented crisis, and enable it to deal effectively with new global economic realities including those related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The EU and Canada will fully support the new WTO Director General. The leaders reaffirmed their commitment to reach a global and consensus-based solution on a fair, sustainable, and modern international tax system that addresses the tax challenges arising from the digitalisation of the economy. Leaders urged the G20 Finance Ministers to reach an agreement on the remaining issues by mid-2021.

The leaders also discussed and agreed upon a range of foreign policy and security issues, including in relation to Belarus, Russia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Eastern Mediterranean, China, Sahel and Venezuela. On China, the EU and Canada expressed their deep concern about the continued arbitrary detention there of Canadians, EU and other foreign nationals. The leaders acknowledged the role of strong transatlantic relations in helping to better address current geopolitical challenges. Leaders also agreed to cooperate more closely in protecting their democracies against malicious cyber activities and disinformation, in tackling arbitrary detention, and in promoting the international rules based system as a whole.

The leaders looked forward to holding the next EU-Canada Leaders' Summit in the near future, when COVID conditions allow, in order to further advance cooperation between the EU and Canada in areas such as: foreign and security policy, international trade and the trading system, climate change and other environmental issues, clean energy, the Arctic, space, the digital transformation, research and innovation, public health, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals/development cooperation.

[Visit the meeting page](#)

Article – Parliament's ideas for tackling harmful or illegal content online



MEPs want the final decision on the legality of user-generated content to be taken by an independent judiciary, not private commercial entities.

In addition to illegal online content being removed, where it is criminal, it should be followed up by law enforcement and the judiciary. The Commission should also consider obliging online platforms to report serious crime to the competent authority.

Ways to tackle harmful content

To address the problem of harmful content such as hate speech or disinformation, MEPs propose increasing transparency obligations for platforms as well as raising media literacy among users.

Parliament noted that one reason disinformation spreads so fast is because some platforms' business models favour showing sensational and clickable content to users to increase profits. To tackle the negative effects of this practice, members want transparency on the monetisation policies of online platforms.

More choice for users over what they see online

MEPs want to give users more control over the content they see and the possibility to opt out of content curation altogether.

They are calling for stricter regulation of targeted advertising in favour of less intrusive, contextualised advertising that is based on what a user is looking at in a given moment and not on their browsing history.

Going further, they want the Commission to look into more options for regulating targeted advertising, including an eventual ban.

The Commission is expected to come up with a proposal for the Digital Service Act by the end of 2020.

Christa Schweng, new President of the EESC: "The input of civil society is a must to shape Europe for the better"



The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) closed its October plenary session, the first of its new term of office, with an online debate on the "Recovery for the future of Europe" with contributions from the presidents of all main EU institutions, who reflected on the role that civil society can play to face the challenges Europe and the whole world are facing.

Christa Schweng, the newly elected President of the EESC started her speech by saying that the EESC *plays a key role in making the voice of organised civil society heard at European level. Thanks to the input of organised civil society, European policies can reflect the situation on the ground more accurately and can be implemented more effectively at national or local level.* This role, according to Ms Schweng, is not only positive, but even necessary: *Hands-on experience of employers, workers, consumers, farmers and NGOs is a must to shape Europe for the better. We act as a bridge: we need to deliver on that role, and I am convinced we can.*

The new President of the EESC took the opportunity of the debate to present the main priorities of her term of office, including the need to *act immediately to restore both the EESC's and our own reputations and rebuild trust and credibility both externally and in-house. We need a Committee that is united and meets the highest ethical and professional standards, a Committee with an excellent image.* With this aim, Ms Schweng announced that Committee's Code of Conduct for Members and the Rules of Procedure will be reinforced.

With a more general perspective, Christa Schweng also highlighted the need to tackle the economic and social hardship caused by COVID-19: *More than ever,*

we need to join forces, develop a vision for a stronger post COVID-19 Europe and do our utmost to ensure that our Committee makes a powerful contribution to Europe's recovery and future resilience. Ms Schweng presented her vision for post-COVID 19 Europe, a Europe that is prospering economically, that is socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable and that enables all civil society parties to thrive and live in an open, values-based society.

Christa Schweng concluded her speech by recalling that the motto of her presidency, "United for the future of Europe", cannot be discussed without talking about the Conference on the Future of Europe. This conference, said Ms Schweng, will be a *unique opportunity* for European Union society. *I am proud that an EESC Resolution adopted in 2017 was the first contribution to the EU-wide debate on the future of Europe. But we will not stop there. I am convinced we will make a substantial and valuable contribution to the Conference on the Future of Europe*, she concluded.

The newly appointed EESC Vice-Presidents also took part in the debate. **Giulia Barbucci**, Vice-President responsible for the Budget, recalled that *the EU has done a great job to tackle the current crisis, but what is still missing is the centrality of people, and the EESC can play a very important role on this. We must convince citizens that the EU is a positive project to contain the economic and social costs of this crisis.* **Cillian Lohan**, Vice-President for Communication stressed that *members of the EESC have a unique perspective of the impact of the EU on the day to day lives of different sectors of society; and in my time as a member I have seen that we can have an impact with our work. We build consensus, and this is the power that brings weight to our work*, concluded Mr. Lohan.

Institutional support

The president of the European Parliament, **David Maria Sassoli**, expressed his gratitude for the support given by the EESC to different initiatives aimed to help people affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. *This crisis can be an opportunity to put Europe in the right track, to build a fairer and more sustainable society, and I'm sure the EESC will continue to represent the interests of our citizens.*

Charles Michel, President of the European Council, sent a video message to emphasize that *the EESC plays a key role in connecting the hopes and expectations of European citizens with EU leaders*, as it represents the voice of the strong and dynamic European civil society.

The president of the European Commission, **Ursula von der Leyen**, also participated in the debate with a video message in which she stressed the important role the EESC has to play in *supporting and delivering a green, digital and resilient recovery. You are in the frontline to measure the impact of this pandemic; the European Commission needs your advice and your experience*, said Ms. Von der Leyen.

Apostolos Tzitzikostas, President of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) expressed his concern about the lack of resources available for local and regional administrations across Europe and recalled that *the EESC and the*

CoR are bridges between citizens and institutions and both promote a participatory democracy.

The voice of the groups

The presidents of the three groups represented at the EESC also contributed to the debate.

Stefano Mallia, President of the Employers' Group, stressed the role of economic actors: *We are convinced that businesses that manage to face the challenges ahead and succeed will be key to the recovery of the EU economy as a whole. Therefore, the EESC Employers' Group calls for a Europe that strengthens the competitiveness of European enterprises, encourages entrepreneurship and provides favourable conditions for innovating, investing, operating and ultimately creating jobs.*

The President of the Workers' Group, **Oliver Röpke**, said that *in difficult times, people need support, a voice to guide them, and I'm convinced that the EESC can be this voice, urging for solidarity as the guiding principle of any recovery strategy. But he also suggested that the EESC must adapt to the times, working more closely with other institutions and civil society organisations to maximize its impact.*

Seamus Boland, President of the Diversity Europe Group outlined that *only with the support of civil society will we make the most of the opportunities offered by the European Union. I call on all of us to apply our imagination and our humanity to improving the lives of our fellow citizens. To render possible, what may at first might appear impossible. That is the role of civil society!*

[Press release – Still a long way to go to achieve gender equality in all EU countries](#)



In the context of the first [European Gender Equality Week](#), the [European Institute for Gender Equality](#) (EIGE) released its [2020 Gender Equality Index](#) this morning. This tool monitors the progress made every year towards gender equality in the EU and in each member state. For 2020, the EU scores 67.9 points out of 100, which shows that progress is slow and that it would take 60 years to reach full gender equality at this current rate.

[Evelyn Regner](#) (S&D, AT), Chair of the Committee for Women's Rights and Gender Equality, reacted: "Thanks to EIGE's work, we know where we stand and what remains to be done to achieve gender equality. It is quite clear that COVID-19 will exacerbate inequalities and put the achievements of the past decades at risk. At this snail's pace, it will take at least 60 more years to get to 100 points in all fields. All our recovery efforts have to be gender mainstreamed so as not to push the heroes of the pandemic into a long-lasting crisis afterwards. The burden of unpaid care work, the segregation of work sectors, the alarming numbers of violent acts against women, and the lack of women in leadership roles will not solve themselves. We need action by all EU countries, and we need binding measures. Quotas for company boards have had the biggest impact on advancing gender equality. Building bridges over the care, pay and pension gaps is the way forward."

[Dimitrios Papadimoulis](#) (GUE/NGL, EL), Vice-President of the Parliament in charge of gender equality and diversity, added: "One aspect is especially striking: having women in power is crucial to promote equality in other fields. Within the European Parliament, we are taking this very seriously and we were able to make significant steps towards closing existing gender gaps. About 40% of the members are women at the moment and we have gender balance among the Vice-Presidents. The EP Bureau has also unanimously approved ambitious new objectives for the Parliament: 50% heads of unit, 50% directors, and 40% directors-general should be women by the end of the legislative period in 2024. Moreover, with the adoption of the Gender Action Plan, we are preparing to take further measures to achieve gender equality across all fields in the Parliament. EIGE has been a very supportive partner in this and its general data, and especially the yearly Gender Equality

Index, are key to reaching our goal of equality.”

Press release – ‘Everything is still to be agreed’: informal talks between Parliament and Council on Rule of law conditionality continue



After concluding the fourth round of informal legislative negotiations with the Council, EP negotiators said on Thursday:

“We did not reach a compromise on the rule of law conditionality mechanism today. Everything is still to be agreed. After internal discussions in the European Parliament, we will return for the fifth trilogue in November.”

Next steps

The next round of informal inter-institutional negotiations is scheduled to take place in the coming weeks.

Background

The European Parliament has been ready to start inter-institutional negotiations on the “rule of law conditionality” regulation since January 2019, [when MEPs approved their first reading position](#).

The EP’s main demand has been to effectively link EU funds to the respect for

the rule of law and fundamental rights in member states, by an “applicable mechanism” that can be triggered effectively. They have also called for the final recipients of EU funds to be protected and for the Parliament to be included in the decision-making process.

In a [recent EU-wide survey](#) (conducted October 2020), 77% of Europeans insisted that the EU should only provide funds to member states if the national government implements the rule of law and democratic principles.