

Weekly schedule of President Charles Michel



Monday 5 October 2020

12.00 Meeting with the President of the Central African Republic Faustin Archange Touadéra

14.30 Video conference with African Union Special Envoys

Tuesday 6 October 2020

09.15 Report to the European Parliament on the special European Council of 1-2 October 2020 (European Parliament)

15.30 EU-Ukraine summit

Wednesday 7 October 2020

14.15 Phone call with Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Boris Johnson

Thursday 8 October 2020

Dublin (local time)

12.30 Meeting with The Taoiseach Micheál Martin followed by press conference

Friday 9 October 2020

10.15 Meeting with General Secretary Luca Visentini of European Trade Union (ETUC)

14.00 Meeting with Milorad Dodik, Željko Komšić and Šefik Džaferović, Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina

15.00 Presentation of letters of credentials

Press release – Parliament demands a legally binding, effective mechanism to protect EU values



In a resolution adopted on Wednesday with 521 votes to 152 and 21 abstentions, the European Parliament puts forward its proposal for an EU mechanism to protect and strengthen democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights.

The need for an effective mechanism

The text reiterates MEPs' concerns regarding "the rise and entrenchment of autocratic and illiberal tendencies", further compounded by COVID-19, as well as "corruption, disinformation and state capture", in several EU countries. It also states that the EU lacks the necessary tools to address an "unprecedented and escalating crisis of its founding values", pointing to Council's inability to make meaningful progress in ongoing [Article 7 procedures](#) and noting that this is "enabling continued divergence".

To effectively protect the European Union's legal order, the fundamental rights of its citizens, and its international credibility from the deterioration of [Article 2 values](#), MEPs propose an evidence-based tool that would apply equally, objectively and fairly to all member states while respecting the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.

An interinstitutional agreement for an "Annual Monitoring Cycle on Union values"

The new "Annual Monitoring Cycle" must include preventive and corrective aspects revolving around country-specific recommendations, with timelines and targets linked to concrete measures, including Article 7 procedures,

infringement proceedings, and budgetary conditionality (once in force). Parliament's proposal would consolidate and supersede existing mechanisms, such as the recent [EC Rule of Law Report](#).

Quote

"Our proposal replaces and complements several tools that have proven to be ineffective, with a single Annual Monitoring Cycle. Failure to address serious issues identified in this context could lead to specific corrective measures, which would be more efficient than our current, incoherent framework, especially once linked to budgetary conditionality. Concluding an inter-institutional agreement would send a powerful signal that the EU is serious about protecting its constitutional foundations", said rapporteur [Michal Šimečka \(Renew, SK\)](#).

Next steps

MEPs will be waiting for the Commission to table a proposal on the basis of this resolution.

Background

Parliament has [asked since 2016](#) for a permanent mechanism to protect democracy and the rule of law. The House has [insisted since 2018](#) that such a new tool should be linked to protecting the European Union's budget when a member state consistently fails to respect the rule of law. MEPs have also [referenced the European Semester](#) as a useful existing resource to draw upon.

[Press release – MEPs approve changes in the European Commission](#)



Mairead McGuinness (Ireland), currently Vice-President of the European Parliament, will be Commissioner in charge of Financial Services, Financial Stability and Capital Markets. Her appointment was approved with 583 in favour, 75 against and 37 abstentions.

The change of portfolio for Commission Executive Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis (Latvia) was approved with 515 in favour, 110 against and 70 abstentions. He is now in charge of Trade.

The reshuffle at the European Commission comes after Trade Commissioner Phil Hogan resigned at the end of August.

Both candidates had to undergo three-hour [public hearings](#) in the European Parliament on 2 October so that MEPs could evaluate their competencies with regard to their respective portfolios.

[Media advisory – Press briefing ahead](#)

of General Affairs Council of 13 October 2020



Press briefing

9 October 2020 at 10:00

by Ambassador Michael Clauß, German presidency

This briefing is “off the record”.

Please note that this press briefing will take place remotely.

In order to participate and ask questions, EU accredited journalists should register using [this link](#). Those who already registered for the video conferences of European affairs ministers earlier this year do not need to do it again.

Deadline for registration: 9 October 2020 at 9:00.

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

For more details, [see the meeting page](#).

Nagorno Karabakh: Remarks by the High Representative / Vice-Pres



Check against delivery!

Thank you Mr President, Honorable Members of the European Parliament,

Members, the current military confrontation along the Line of Contact in the Nagorno Karabakh conflict zone is of our utmost concern. It is the largest confrontation since 1993-1994. We have been very engaged on this issue.

On the day that fighting erupted, [I released a statement as High Representative](#), calling for an immediate cessation of hostilities, de-escalation and strict observance of the ceasefire. During the past days, I have had several phone calls, separately, with the Armenian and the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministers, urging both sides to stop the hostilities and to return to the negotiating table.

Our position is clear: the fighting must stop. Both sides need to re-engage in meaningful negotiations – which, by the way, have not been very fruitful in the last 30 years – without preconditions, under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs. There can be no military solution to the conflict, nor external interference. This [position was reinforced by the European Council](#) held on the 1st and 2nd of October.

We have seen extremely worrying reports of a surge in attacks on populated areas, which is taking a deadly toll on civilians. We strongly urge the sides to fully observe their international obligations to protect civilian populations. And, with the resources we have, we have [urgently allocated a small amount of money](#) [€500,000] in humanitarian aid for the affected populations.

In fact, we do not have a lot of information about how the conflict is developing. Detailed information is scarce and there is a lot of fake news.

OSCE monitoring on the ground remains suspended, so we do not have observers. But what we observe is an increasing amount of disinformation, which is aimed at mobilising the domestic audiences in both countries and could be used to pull regional actors into the conflict. Media reports need, therefore, to be examined with great caution, because we do not have confirmation of some of the news that has been disseminated.

At this stage, further escalation of the conflict and involvement of regional actors, unhappily, cannot be excluded. This would seriously threaten the stability of the whole region.

On the 30th of September, I discussed the situation with the Russian Foreign Minister and I also spoke with the Turkish Foreign Minister – the two regional actors that are closer to the conflict. I emphasised the importance of de-escalation, the importance that regional actors refrain from any activity and rhetoric that could inflame things even further.

I spoke to the Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan during the weekend. I stressed that the increase of civilian casualties is unacceptable. I heard from both sides the actions taken by the other side; each one of them blames the other for starting and for attacking civilian populations, not in Nagorno Karabakh itself, not in the region in dispute, but from Armenia to

Azerbaijan and from Azerbaijan to Armenia.

The fighting should stop. The OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairs are going to have meetings this week with the Foreign Affairs Ministers of the two countries, and the only way to get out of this situation is that the Minsk Group Co-chairs pushes for immediate negotiations as soon as possible.

We will continue working with key partners to try to help stop the hostilities, because the only solution is to go back to the negotiating table. But this negotiation table has been open for the last 30 years without any kind of advance. War is not an alternative; we have to push both parties to stop fighting and start negotiating without preconditions. But this is, for the time being, not the case.

I am sorry that I cannot inform you more about that, because as I said, the information is very much scarce and we have to take care not to disseminate news that has not been confirmed.

About the situation in Cyprus, I share the concerns of the Honorable Member who took the floor a moment ago. For sure this issue of Famagusta was taken into consideration at the European Council as well. The opening of this area, which is a closed area according to the ceasefire agreements under the auspices of the United Nations is a serious violation of this agreement and [yesterday we issued an statement](#) and today the 27 [EU Member States] will issue another one asking Turkey to stop doing this activity. You know that the [European Council issued a statement on the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean](#). For sure this is not going to help. On the contrary, it is going to increase tensions and to make it more difficult to reach an agreement on an especially difficult situation for all of us on the Eastern Mediterranean.

Thank you.

Link to the video: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-195714>

Closing remarks

Thank you President, thank you to all of you for your interesting and engaging remarks.

I think your message is clear, it has been repeated 65 times with different voices, but expressing the same concerns and the same request to act.

Next Monday, I will bring your voice to the [Foreign Affairs Council in Luxembourg](#), where we will have to follow up on the situation and see what we can decide about it.

But the [European Council was very clear](#) that they consider that the framework within which to mediate and to act on this conflict is the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs. This was clearly what the European Council said. They asked me to support the work of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs – and that is what we are doing. But we have to let this group of people work, because it is the only one that has been recognised by the two sides.

I think that Mr [Reinhard] Bütikofer [Member of the European Parliament] is right when he says that there are some new things in this conflict. One is that Americans are withdrawing and Turkey is taking a stronger, much more assertive position.

The European Council also discussed about the relationship with Turkey. I invite you to read the [conclusions of the European Council](#), which say that in December, we will take stock of the evolution of the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean and all the conflicts in which Turkey is more or less involved, in order to take decisions on how we continue our relationship with Turkey.

We are going to continue calling for a ceasefire. I will bring your voice to the Foreign Affairs Council. We will remind the two sides of their obligation to protect civilians under international humanitarian law. And we will keep working, also with Turkey, in order to build a constructive contribution to the conflict settlement and help the efforts to stop the hostilities.

We have a Special Representative for the South Caucasus [Mr Toivo Klaar], who is there and who is in touch with the two sides of the conflict.

Yesterday, the Turkish [Foreign] Minister [Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu] was in Baku, and I was really concerned when I saw that he was expressing full support to Azerbaijan. My last talk with Azerbaijani Minister [Jeyhun Bayramov] was also very worrisome, because he was clearly saying that the fight will continue until Armenia accepts a concrete schedule for withdrawing from Nagorno Karabakh, which is a precondition for conversation, for talks. It is very difficult. The situation is really becoming worse and worse.

All of you have been asking to act, but I have heard very few concrete versions of the verb 'act'. What do you mean by 'act'? We will do whatever we can do in order to support the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs, which is the framework that the European Council decided to support in order to look for a negotiated solution, pushing both sides to stop the fighting, and especially putting pressure on Turkey to not continue to intervene. But to 'act' – if you mean by 'act' taking military action – is completely out of question.

We are going to do what we can do as the European Union, with the resources we have in the diplomatic arena. The European Council has decided to see what is going on from now until December to review our relationship with Turkey. This is what the European Council decided after a long discussion on our relations with Turkey. I have to stick to that. I will obey and I will try to implement the mandate of the European Council in order to support the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs that I hope this week will have meetings with the Foreign Affairs Minister of Azerbaijan and I hope with the Foreign Affairs Minister of Armenia as well.

Thank you.

Link to the video: <https://audiovisual.ec.europa.eu/en/video/I-195715>